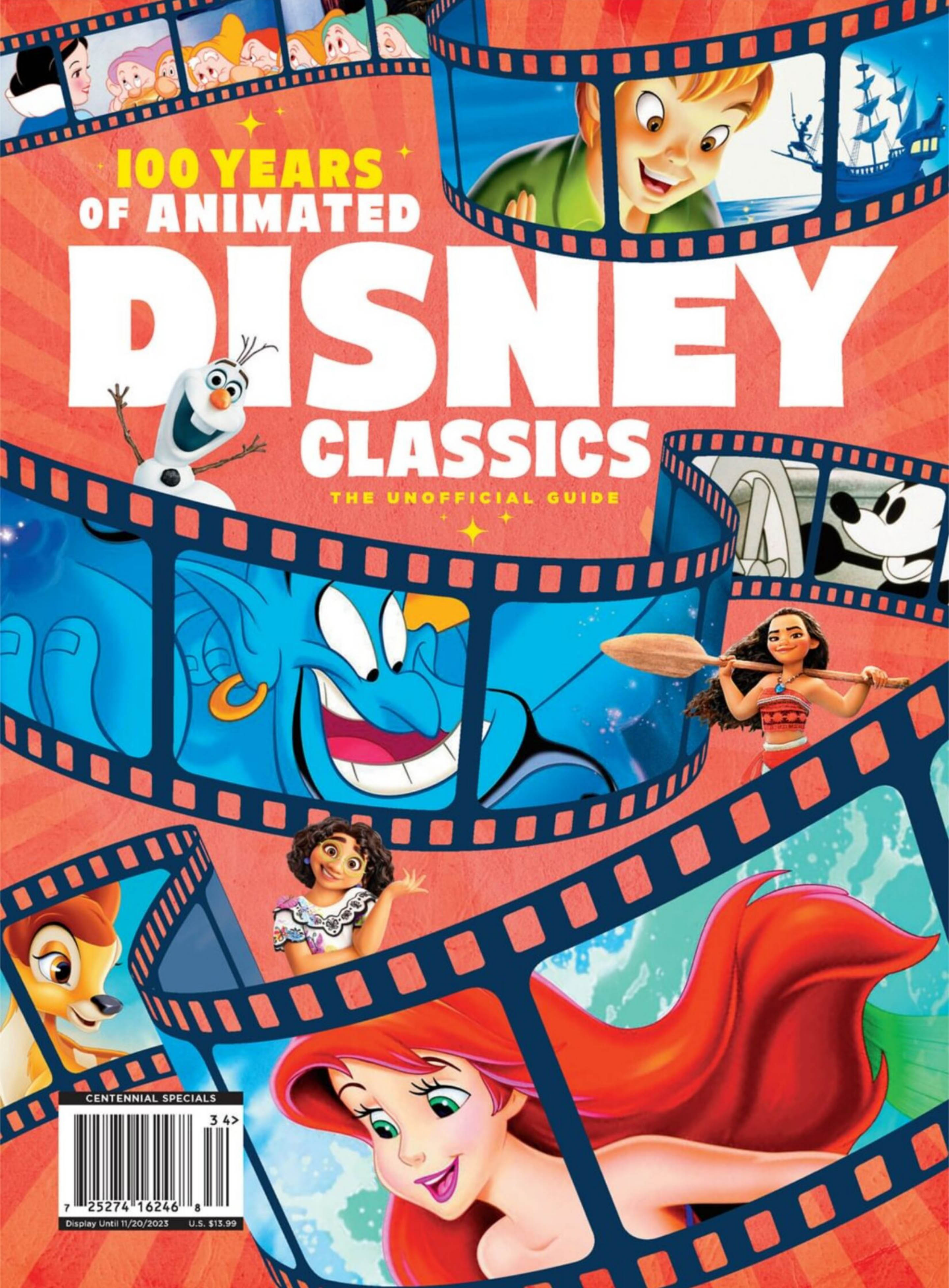


100 YEARS
OF ANIMATED

DISNEY

CLASSICS

THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE

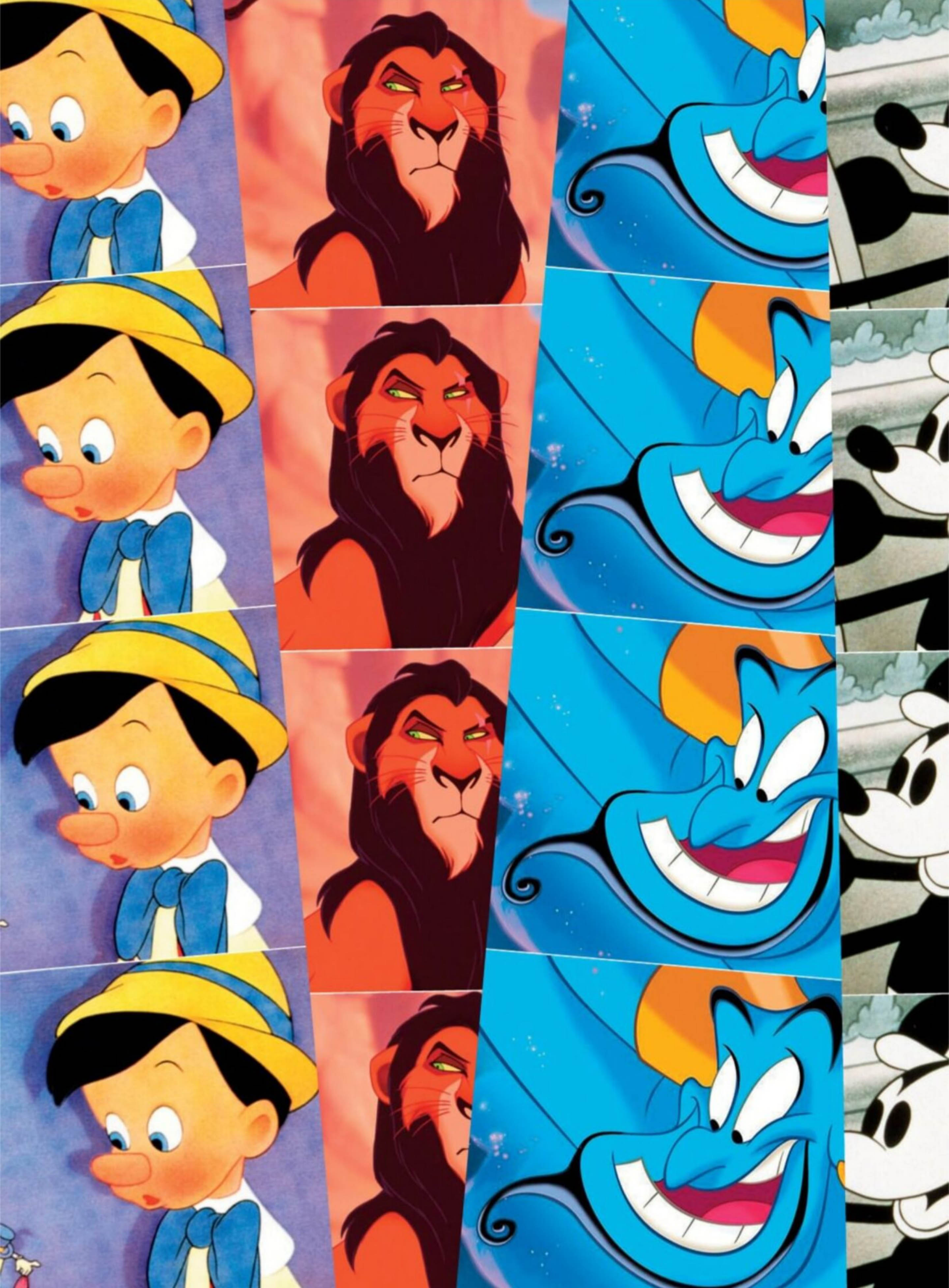


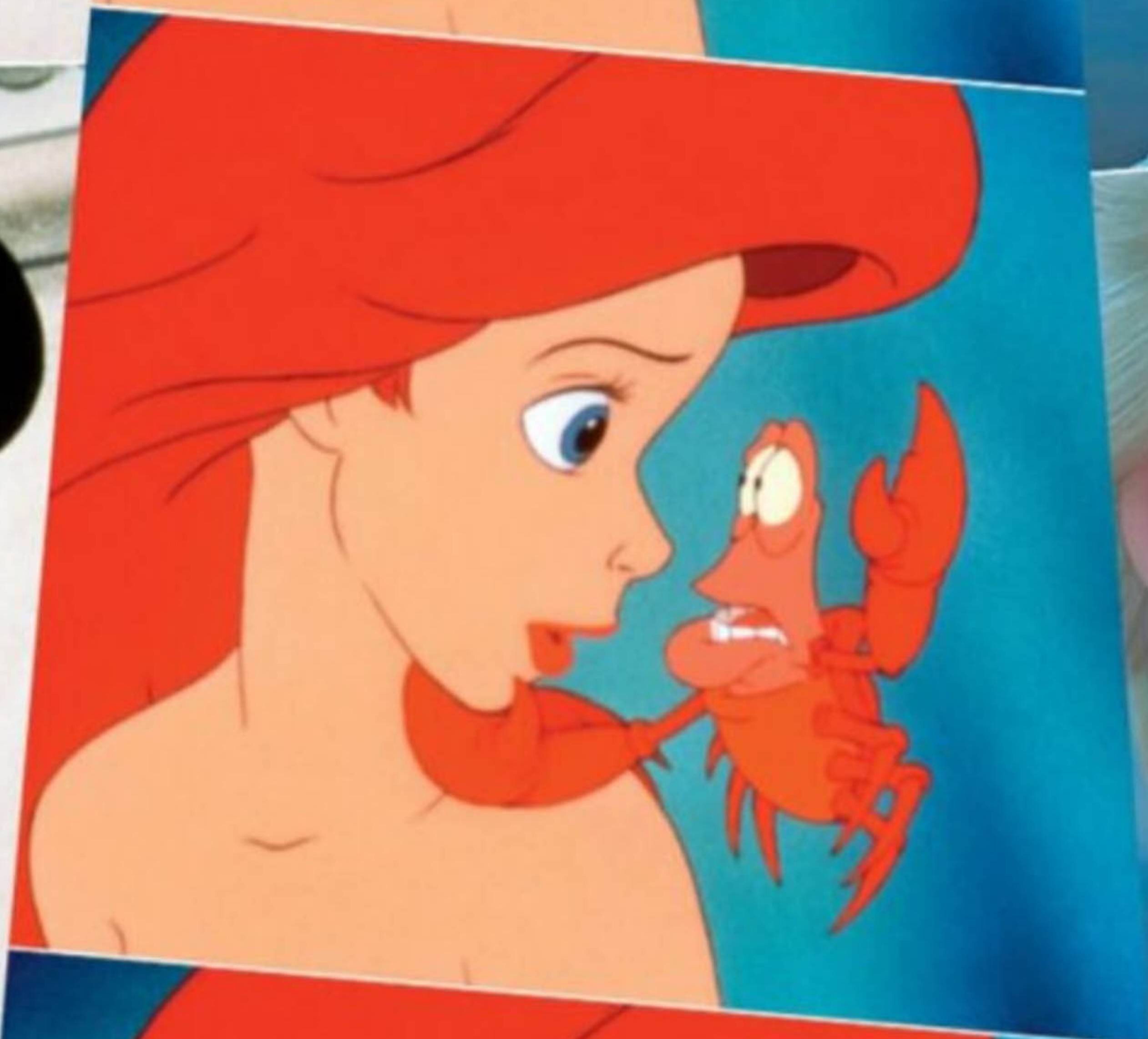
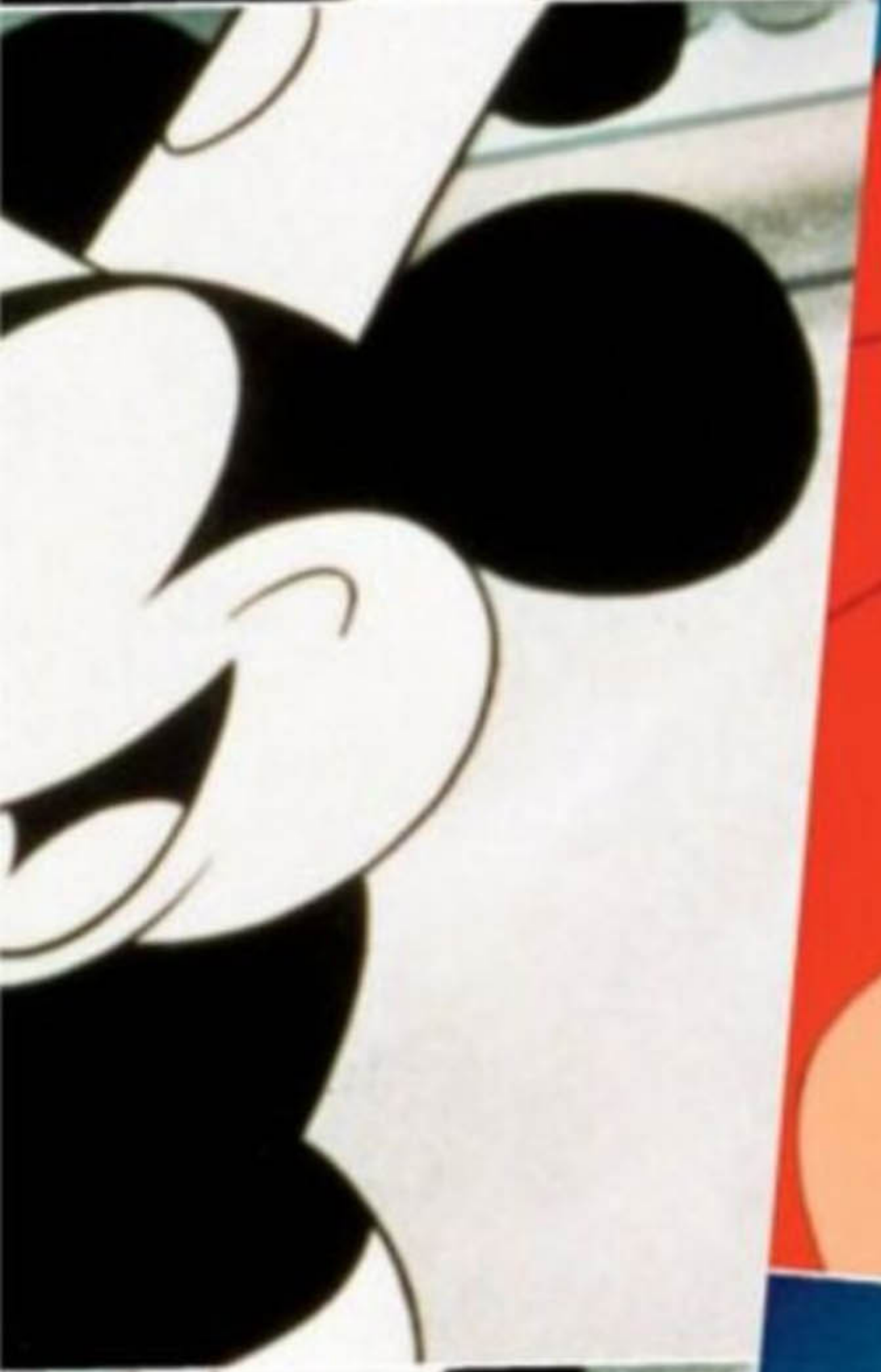
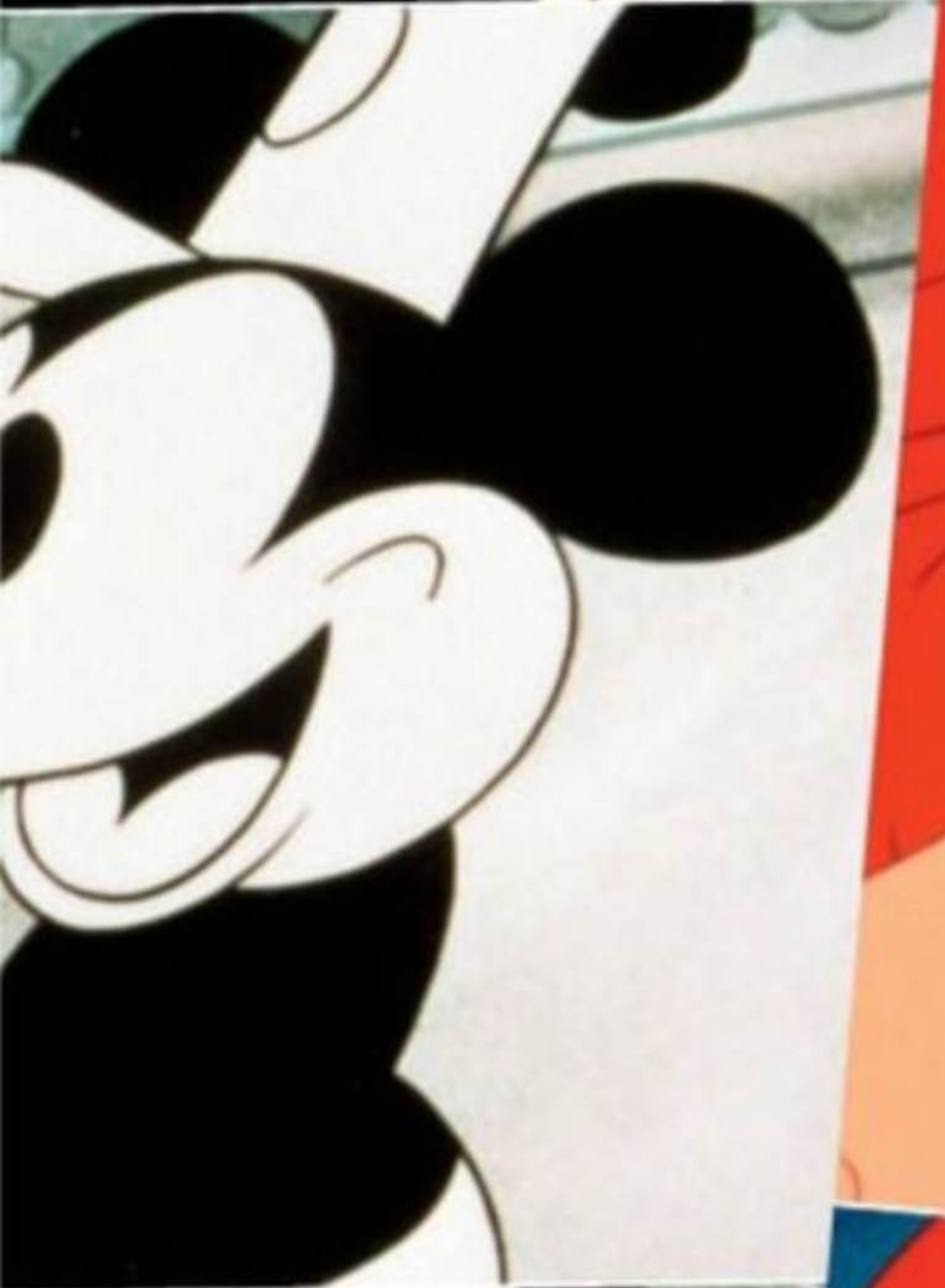
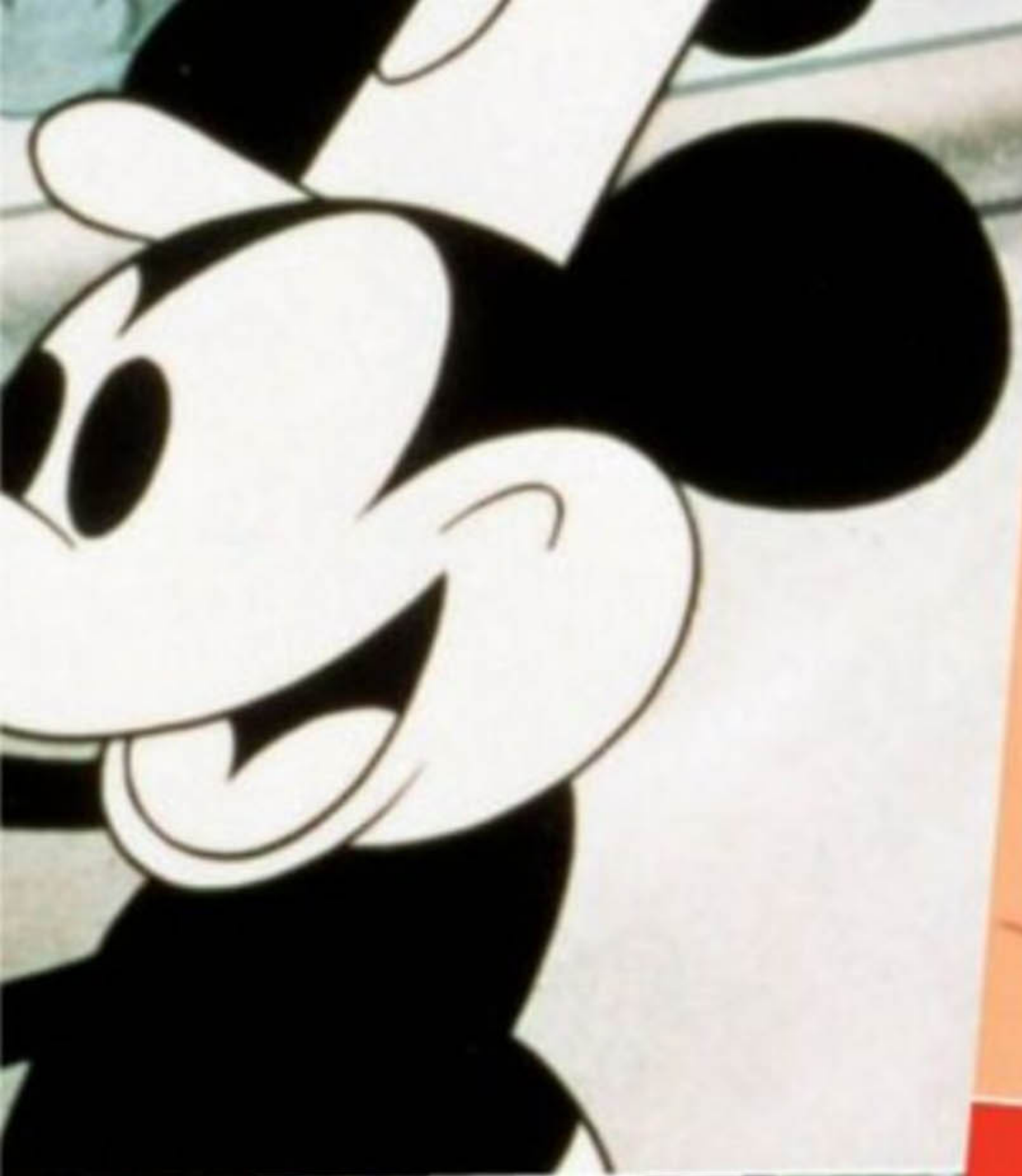
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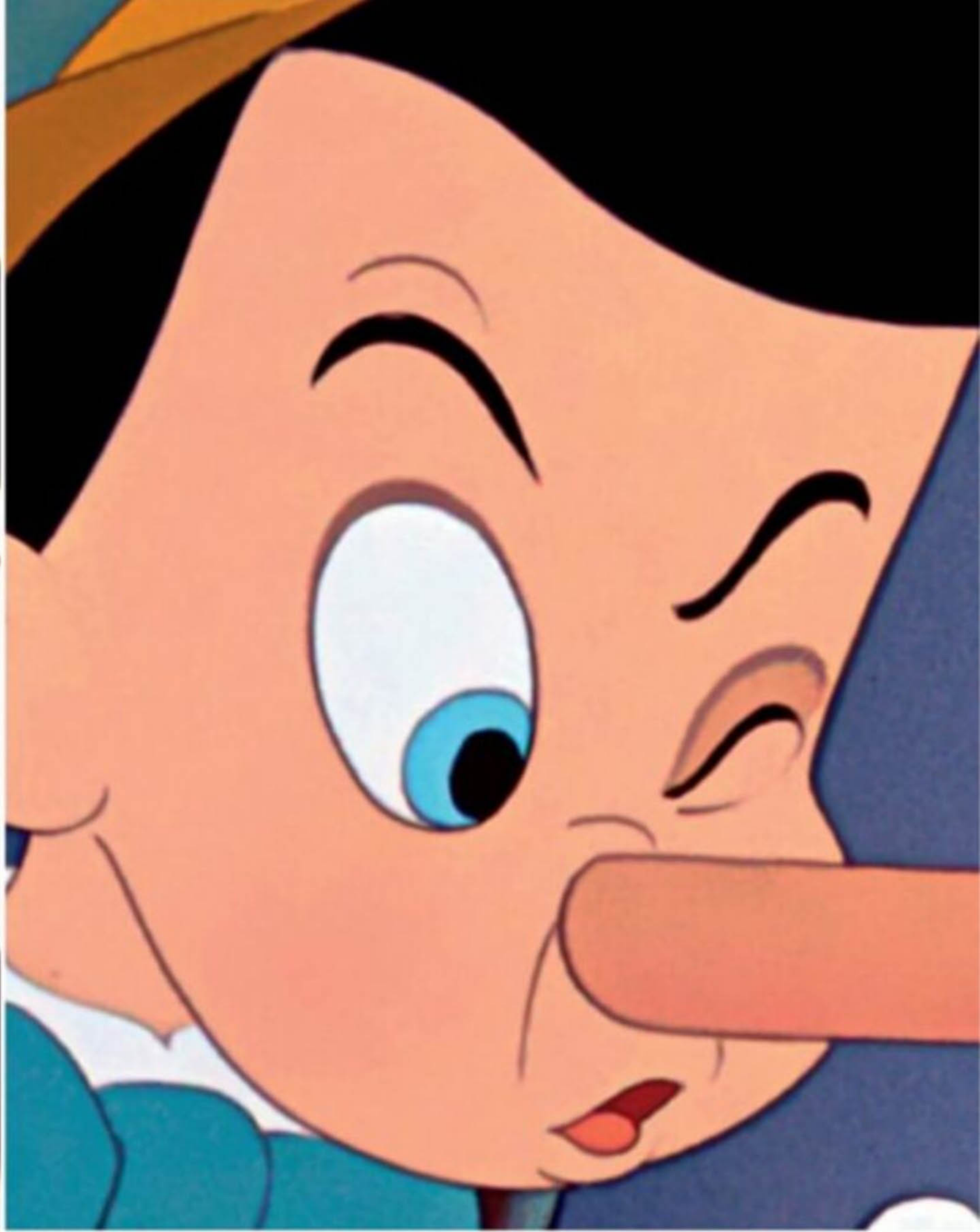
DAWN OF A NEW ERA

How a downturn at Disney Animation Studios led to a renaissance—and a rebirth of the company's central identity

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WHY WE LOVE DISNEY ANIMATED MOVIES

EVERYONE HAS A BELOVED MEMORY OF FILMS AND
CHARACTERS THAT WE ALL SHARE

In 1933, the Golden Age of Hollywood was in full swing, with movie stars lighting up the silver screen—and filling gossip columns in newspapers around the country. As a result, names such as Clark Gable, Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn would soon become legendary. Yet none of these iconic figures were destined to match the popularity or longevity of a scampish cartoon mouse named Mickey.

Five years after his 1928 debut, Mickey Mouse was a full-fledged global sensation. He starred in 12 short films in 1933, earned an honorary Oscar, and received a record 800,000 letters from fans around the world. There was just something about him—maybe his heart and pluck and comedic timing—that resonated with audiences of all ages. Mickey's pals (Minnie, Donald, Goofy, Daisy and Pluto) also possessed a similar intangible *something* that eventually would make them almost as famous.

Disney's character's never lacked for work. They peddled hot dogs at the fair, danced in

barns, drove taxis, rescued kittens and had their best laid plans backfire. If it sounds relatable now, it was even more so during the Great Depression.

Along the way, they turned Walt Disney into a tycoon and his film company into an empire. In 1937, when the studio released *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, its first full-length animated feature, it was an instant smash. *Snow White* set the template: Disney's movies would thereafter follow the roadmap of the classic hero's journey, which the studio would ensure was infused with plenty of heart and hilarity. The first Disney films were adaptations of classic fairy tales. Eventually, Disney crafted films of modern mythology and made them into new classics.

To call these full-length movies "cartoons" is to miss the point entirely. They are more like cultural touchstones, rights of passage shared across generations, with timeless messages and familiar friends. This is the story of Disney animation—a piece of Americana that enchants and delights as strongly today as it did 100 years ago.

Mickey Mouse in "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" segment of the 1940 Disney animated film *Fantasia*. By this point, 12 years after his debut, Mickey had already won an Academy Award.



CHAPTER 1

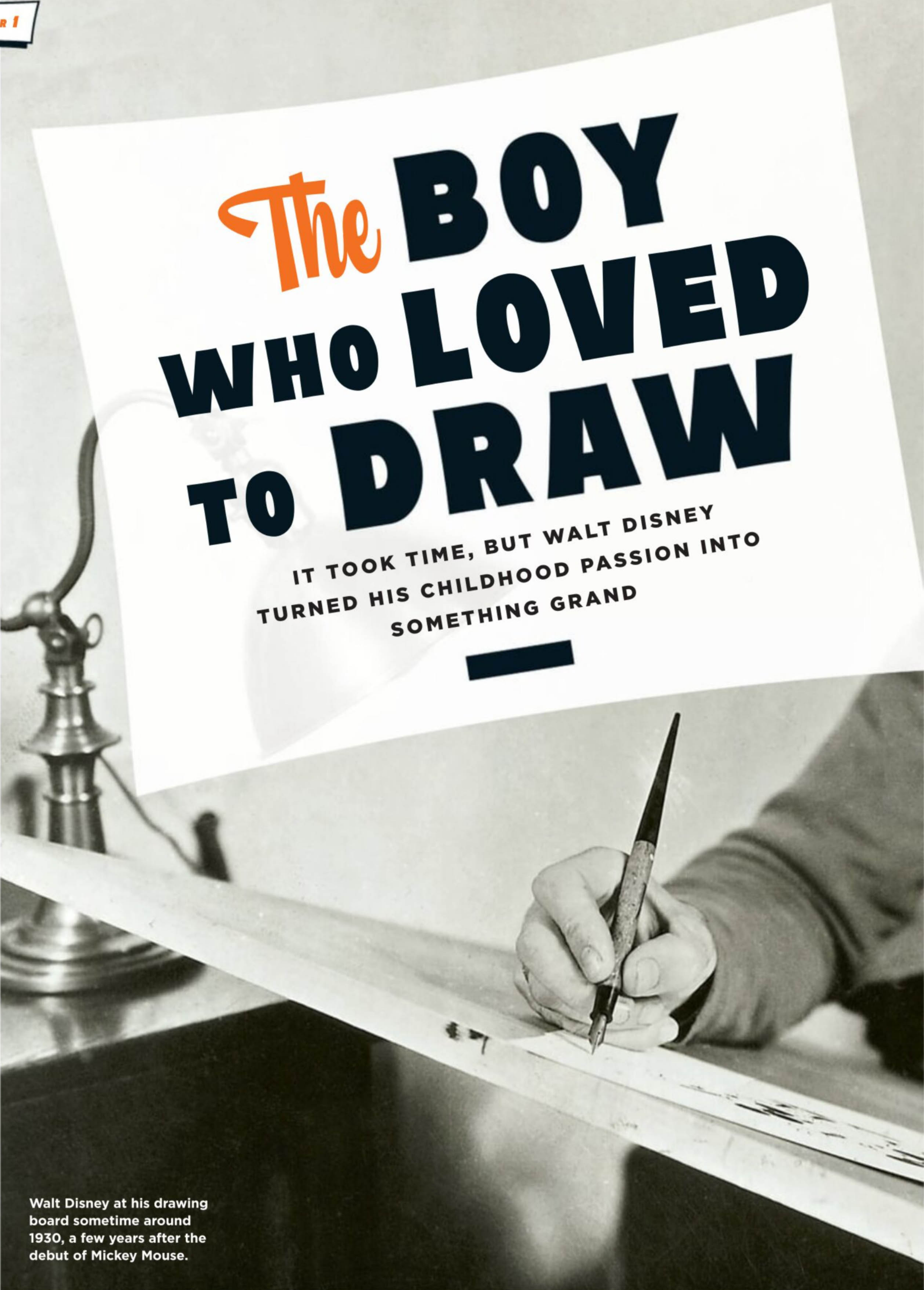
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Beginnings

THE BIRTH OF
DISNEY STUDIOS

The BOY WHO LOVED TO DRAW

IT TOOK TIME, BUT WALT DISNEY
TURNED HIS CHILDHOOD PASSION INTO
SOMETHING GRAND



Walt Disney at his drawing board sometime around 1930, a few years after the debut of Mickey Mouse.



Somewhere in France
April 13th 1919

Dear School Chums:

Well, how is every thing around McKinley High School? Fine.

I just remembered that I owed a letter to my old school paper, so here it is.

Well, I am feeling fine and to-day every one back home is the same. I am having a fine time and also working hard. I am stationed in Neufchateau not far from the headquarters of Gen. Pershing.

BON JOUR COMRADES

France is an interesting place but just the same I want to -- to --

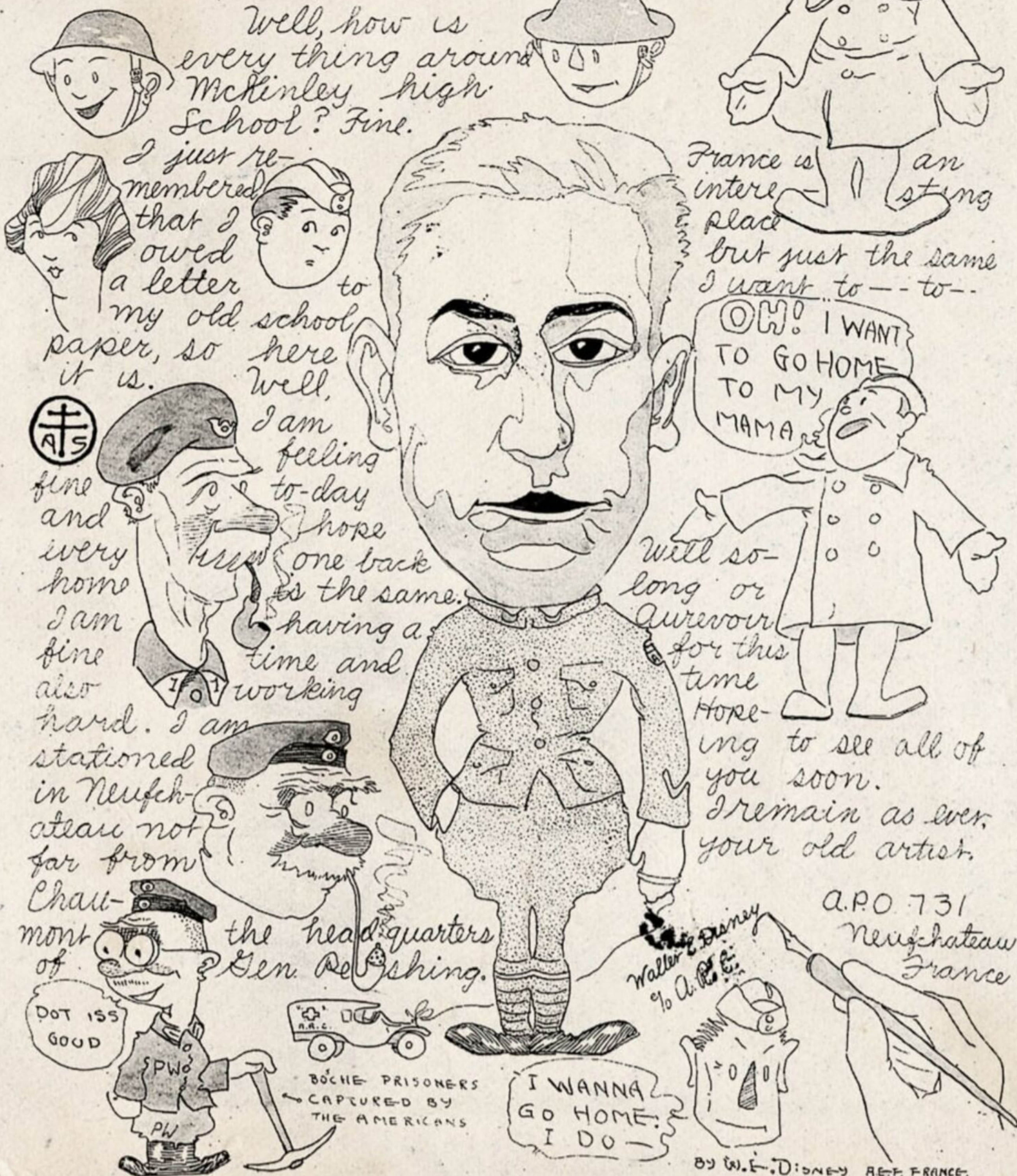
OH! I WANT TO GO HOME TO MY MAMA

Will so-long or au revoir for this time. Hoping to see all of you soon. I remain as ever, your old artist.

A.P.O. 731
Neufchateau
France

Walt Disney
% A.P.O. 731

BY W.E. DISNEY REF. FRANCE.





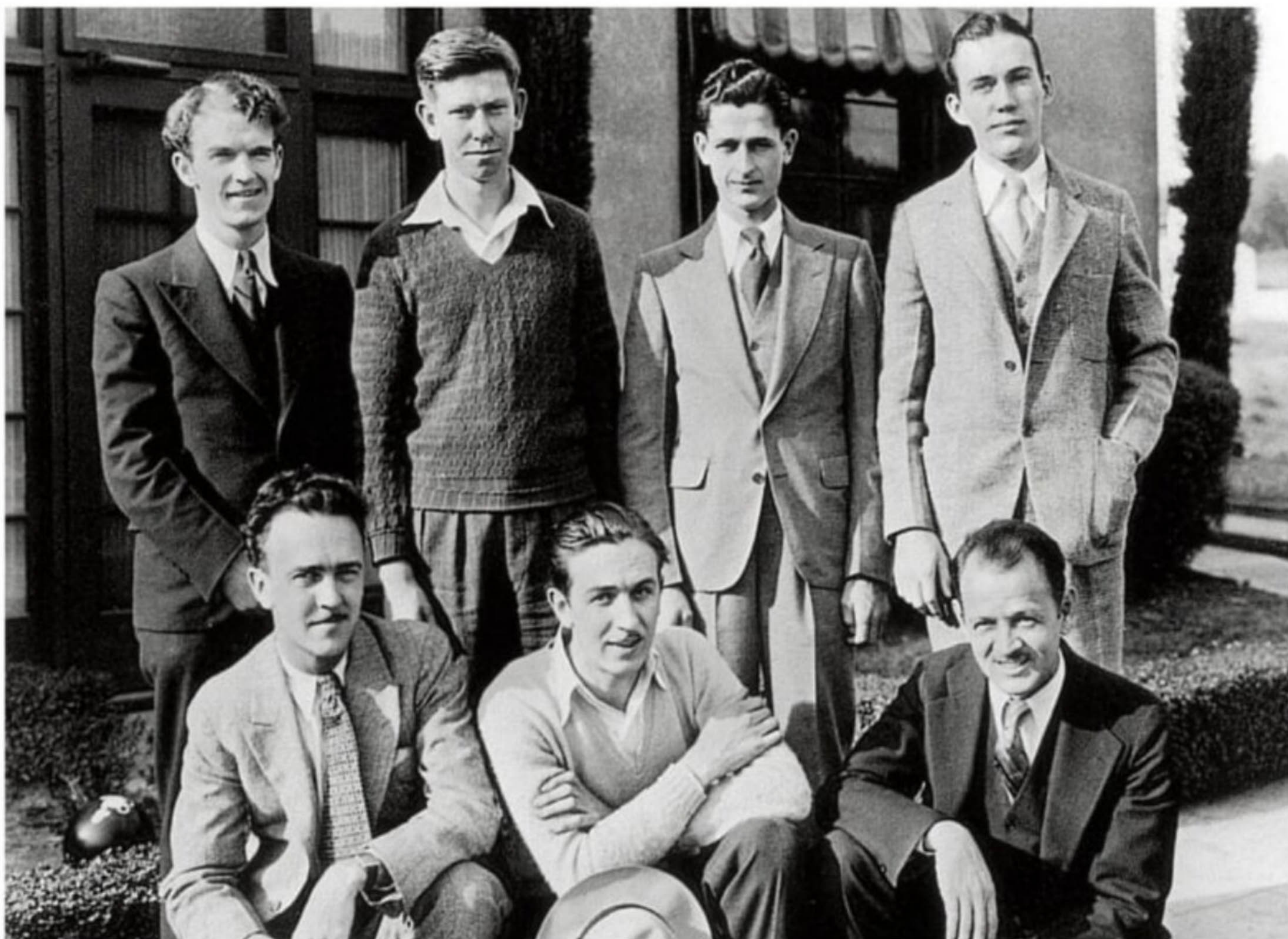
In October 1954, during an episode of his *Disneyland* TV show, Walt Disney tried to offer some perspective on his life's work for viewers at home. The unique theme park that the TV show was introducing would not have been possible without Disney's animated movies, he emphasized, and that business "was all started by a mouse."

Intended to showcase humble roots and perhaps inspire others to pursue their dreams, the now-iconic line was an indisputably true statement about Disney's company, which had been launched by the success of the Mickey Mouse cartoon shorts. But Mickey didn't just materialize out of nowhere—it had taken Walt Disney nearly two decades of intermittent education and many professional failures to become a success.

Drawing cartoons was one of Disney's favorite things to do during a childhood split between Missouri and Illinois. As a kid in Kansas City, he spent his Saturdays taking drawing classes at the Kansas City Art Institute, and continued to draw after moving to Chicago, with evening lessons at that city's Academy of Fine Arts. To pay for classes, Walt would sometimes clean jars at the jelly factory partially owned by his father, Elias Disney.

Disney's other formative experience was serving as an editor, photographer and cartoonist

A collection of early Disney artwork, including a full-page letter he sent from France in 1919 (far left).



for *The McKinley Voice*, the school newspaper at Chicago's William McKinley High. Much of Walt's work for the school paper was political in nature, with a particular satirical focus on World War I. His interest in the war ultimately led him to drop out of school. He lied about his age to enlist in the Red Cross, and spent his time overseas driving ambulances around the battlefields of France.

Even during the war, Disney kept drawing. When friends in his unit would go out for some much-needed R and R, Walt would stick around the base, sharpening his art skills by drawing illustrations for the canteen menu, doodling notes to friends back home at McKinley High, and even making a few bucks by producing little cartoons that fellow soldiers would send to family back

home. "I found out that the inside and outside of an ambulance is as good a place to draw as any," he would later say.

Upon returning home, Disney decided to eschew reenrolling in high school and instead began looking for work. He returned once again to Kansas City and took a job designing ads and posters for movies at the Kansas City Film Ad Company.

Disney didn't stay. But his time there proved life-changing, because that's where he met Ub Iwerks, the master animator who would go on to design Mickey Mouse. Together, the two men would experience a roller coaster of excitement and disappointment, starting with the launch of their first animation studio, Iwerks-Disney Commercial Artists, based in Kansas City.

Disney (front row, center) in 1929 with his studio crew, including Ub Iwerks and Carl Stalling (front row, left and right).



When that short-lived venture closed, it led to another business enterprise, the slightly more successful Laugh-O-Gram studios. Always enamored with fantasy worlds and children's stories, Disney decided that Laugh-O-Gram would produce animated fairy tales and nursery rhymes.

Among the studio's innovations was an ad for a local movie house called Newman's, which featured a series of short animations that depicted the theater's refreshments and new films. The famed *Alice* comedies, which mixed animation and live action, were also produced at Laugh-O-Gram. But despite the bright ideas, the studio filed for bankruptcy in 1923, just two years after it had been founded.

The dissolution of Laugh-O-Gram was hard for Disney to take, and he soon left Kansas City in

favor of Los Angeles, where his older brother Roy was recovering from a bout of tuberculosis. Movie studios had started moving West in the mid-1910s, and Walt was less interested in producing ads there than producing animation that could stand on its own as entertainment.

Again, there were serious ups and downs in Los Angeles, where Walt and Roy established the Disney Brothers Studio (later Walt Disney Productions) in October 1923. Their first big success, a character named Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, was a smash hit for Universal. But Universal held the rights to Oswald and eventually pushed Disney out during a contract dispute. That betrayal stung. But the setback led to a fateful train ride, from New York back to L.A., that changed Disney's fortunes—and movie history—forever.

Disney with penguins (above) around the time he was working on the 1934 animated short film *Peculiar Penguins*.

Disney's creation of Mickey Mouse in 1928 was an instant success—and turned around the fortunes of his studio.



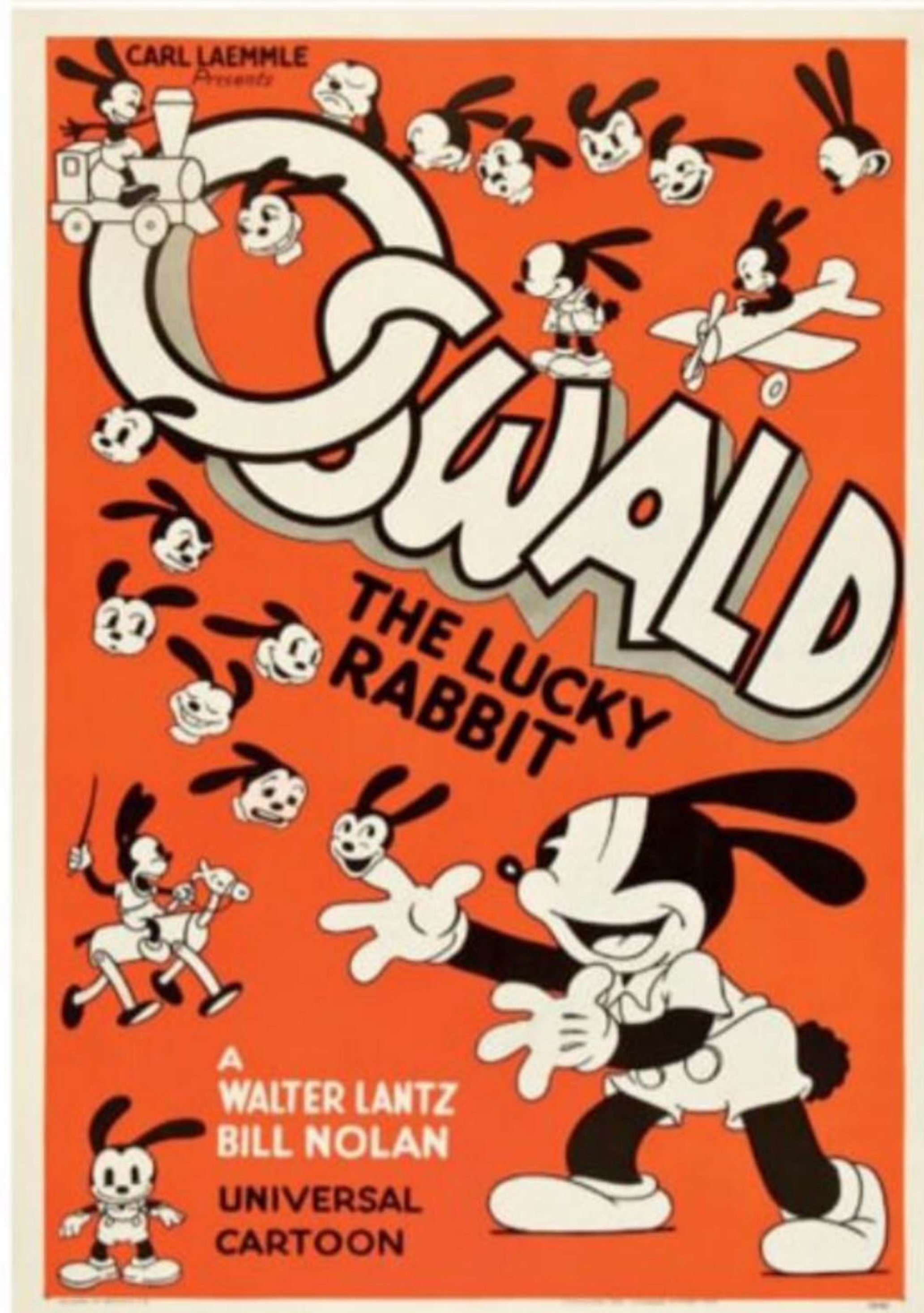
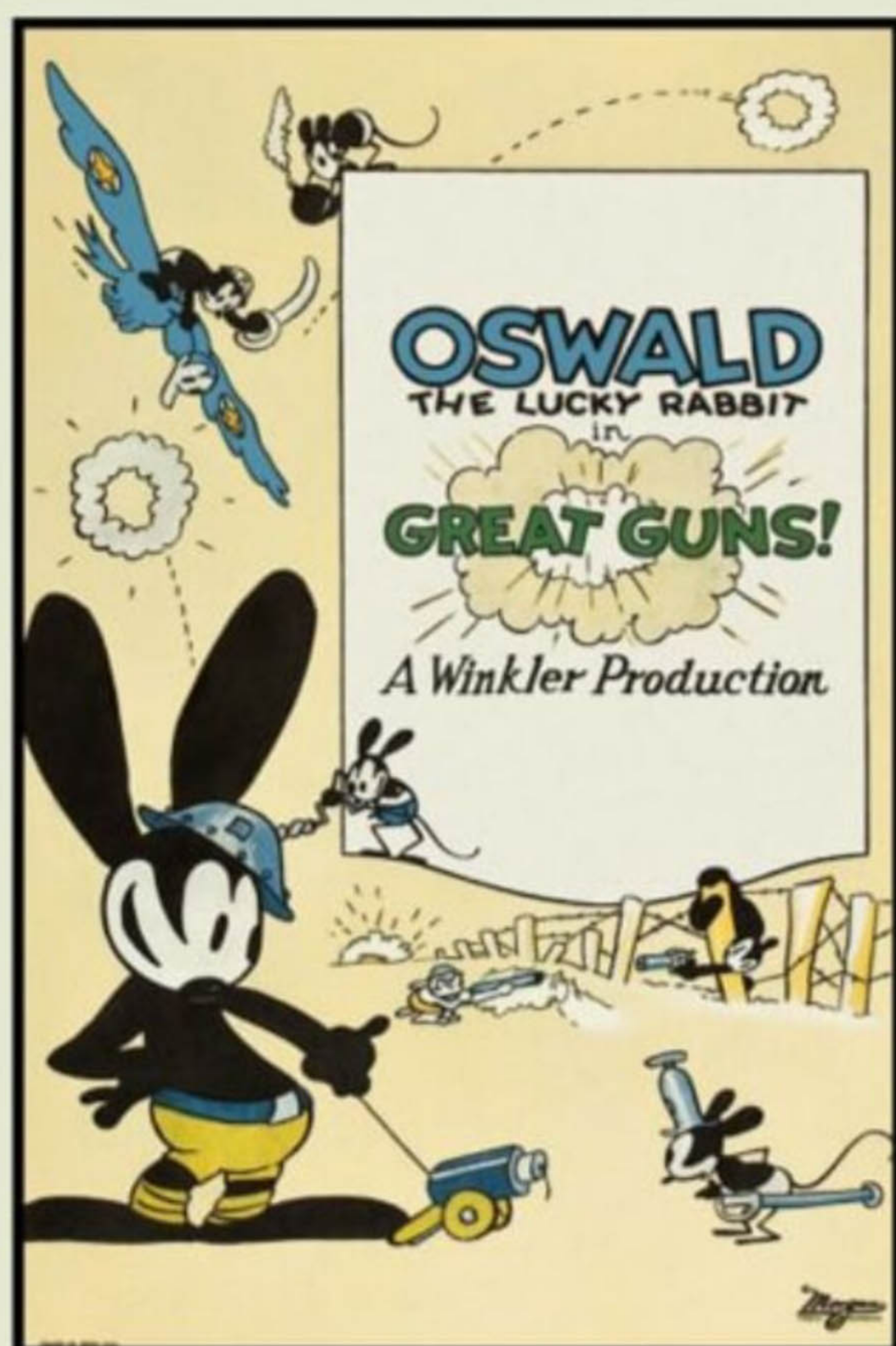
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CHARACTER THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

MICKEY WAS THE RIGHT MOUSE AT THE RIGHT TIME





B

Black body, giant ears, short shorts and a knowing smirk—the similarities between Walt Disney’s first two leading characters, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit and Mickey Mouse, are unmistakable. Disney created Oswald in 1927 after learning that Universal Studios was looking to get into the animation game. The rabbit combined a confidence and fallibility that gave him more personality than any cartoon character that had come before.

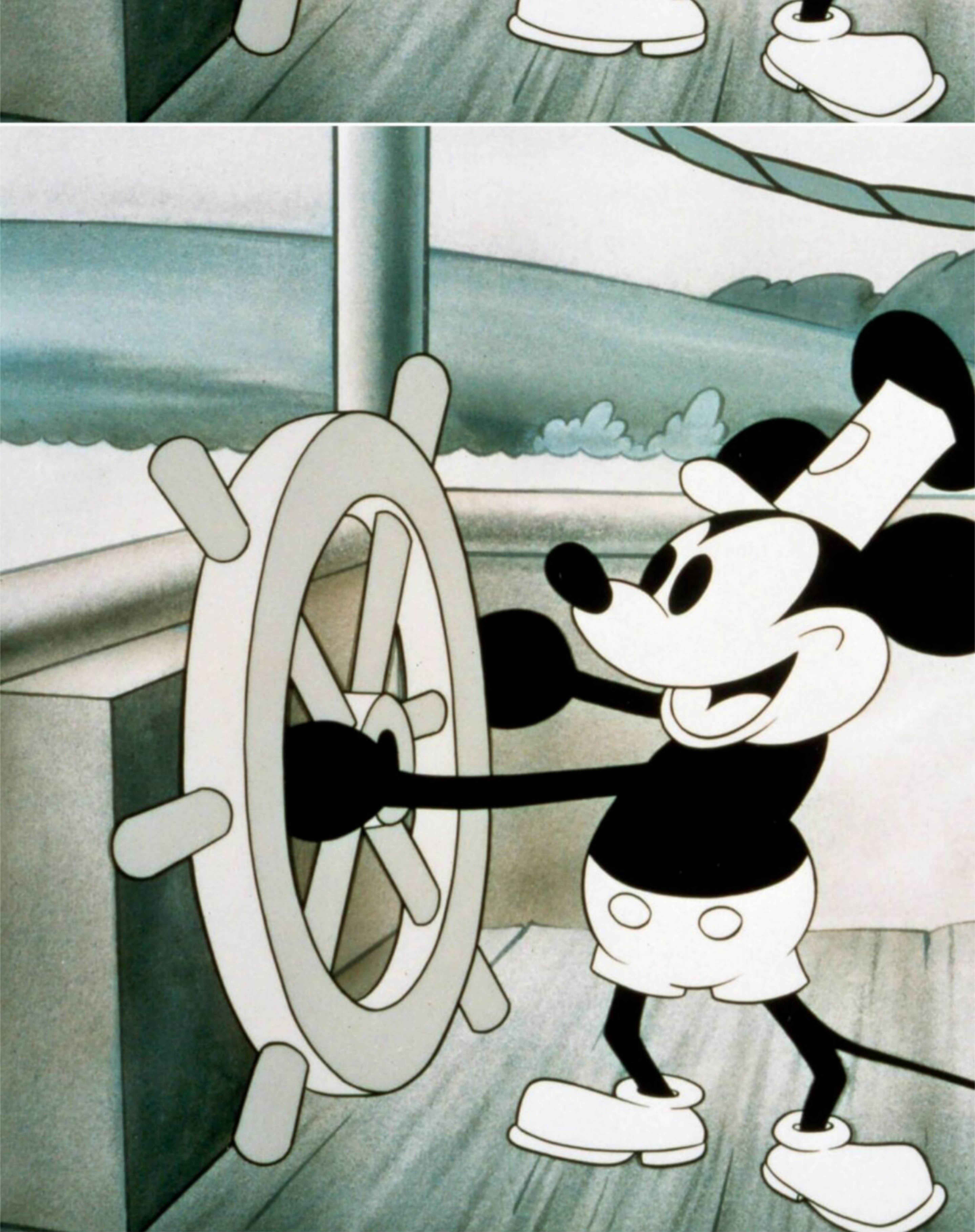
“I want the characters to *be* somebody,” Disney said at the time. “I don’t want them to just be a drawing.”

Oswald the Lucky Rabbit had hopes, dreams, friends and a very high tolerance for embarrassment and pain, which came in handy as Disney and partner Ub Iwerks began to make him the butt of gags built on physical humor set in realistic environments. Oswald’s slapstick physicality borrowed from the genius of silent film stars such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, whose loose-limbed gracefulness made them seem like living cartoon characters.

Disney directed more than two dozen Oswald cartoons between 1927 and ’28, reflecting the success of the character and the public demand for more shorts. The Walt Disney Studios was humming with activity, with Iwerks heading up the animation and Disney the creative storytelling.

The physical similarities between Disney’s first successful cartoon character, Oswald the Lucky Rabbit (above), and Mickey Mouse (right, with Disney and his wife, Lillian) are impossible to miss.





"I WANT THE CHARACTERS TO BE SOMEBODY."

WALT DISNEY

But—unbeknownst to both—talented animators began to quietly leave the studio to work for producer Charles Mintz, who wanted to make Oswald cartoons on the cheap at Universal.

Eventually, Disney was faced with a decision: He could either take a smaller cut to keep working on the popular cartoon he'd created, or he could walk away and start over. He chose the latter, determined to create an even bigger hit character with a contract that gave him full rights to the property.

It was a disappointing experience, but an ultimately fortuitous one. After several days of business meetings in Manhattan, where Disney learned his contract for the Oswald series wouldn't be renewed, he sent a telegram to his brother Roy that all was OK with the business. Then he boarded a cross-country train bound for Hollywood and got to work. By the time the train arrived, Disney had drafted the rough design for a new character that fused Oswald's mischievous side with Disney's own sense of bravery and hope.

His name was Mortimer—at least until Disney's wife, Lillian, suggested that Mickey was a more approachable name for such a plucky mouse. Iwerks, meanwhile, applied his artistic expertise to Disney's rough sketch, and within weeks, Mickey Mouse was ready for his big-screen debut.

It's remarkable in hindsight that Disney was unable to find distributors for Mickey's first two cartoon adventures. Remarkable, but understandable—they had been created as silent

A still from the 1928 animated short *Steamboat Willie*, which introduced the world to Mickey Mouse.



**PART
TROUBLEMAKER,
PART UNDERDOG,
MICKEY WAS
A... SENSATION
FROM THE START.**

pictures. At the time, Hollywood was already transitioning to talkies, so Mickey's first films were a bit old fashioned for something "new."

Disney and Iwerks adjusted, synchronizing the action of their third short, *Steamboat Willie*, to match a full soundtrack. The result is exhilarating—Mickey's personality springs to life as he cheerfully pilots a steamboat before being chased away by the ship's angry captain, a huge cat named Pete. Slapstick ensues, Minnie Mouse is rescued, and Mickey winds up peeling potatoes at the bottom of the ship and laughing all the while.

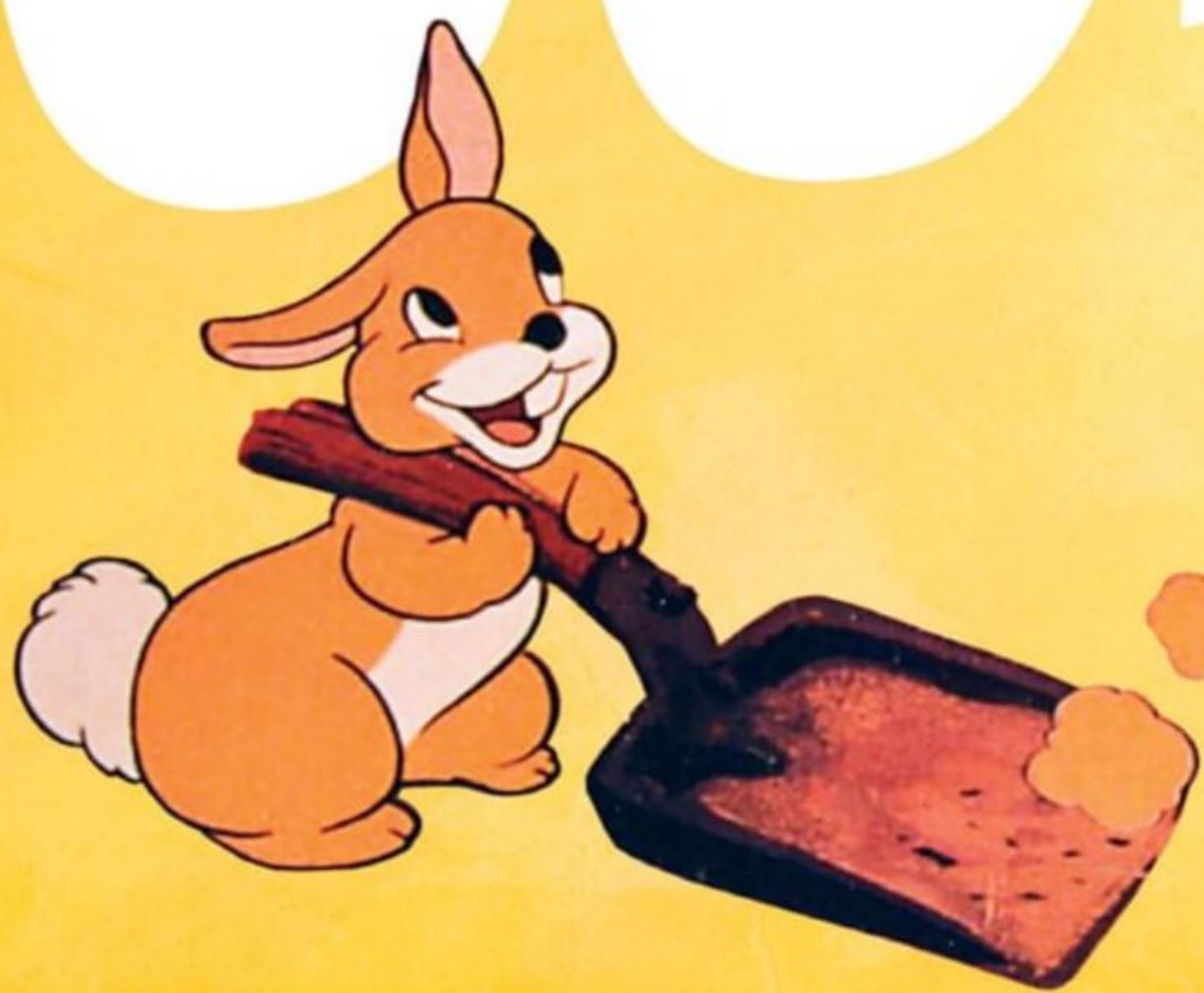
It was a smashing debut. Part troublemaker, part underdog, Mickey was a full-on sensation from the start. More shorts followed, and the public lapped them up, embracing the scrappy hero and the feel-good fun as the Great Depression settled in across the country.

With Mickey, Disney and Iwerks had tweaked the formula that had made Oswald a hit, adding an additional secret ingredient that delivered what the public needed most: optimism. Behind the business savvy of Roy Disney, merchandising sales went through the roof. But, if one breakout character had been enough to stabilize Disney's studio—ambition and dreams were about to lead to even greater developments.

Disney talks things over in 1946 with his older brother Roy (above, left), who handled much of the studio's business affairs; a Disney animator working on a Mickey Mouse cartoon (right).



GO!



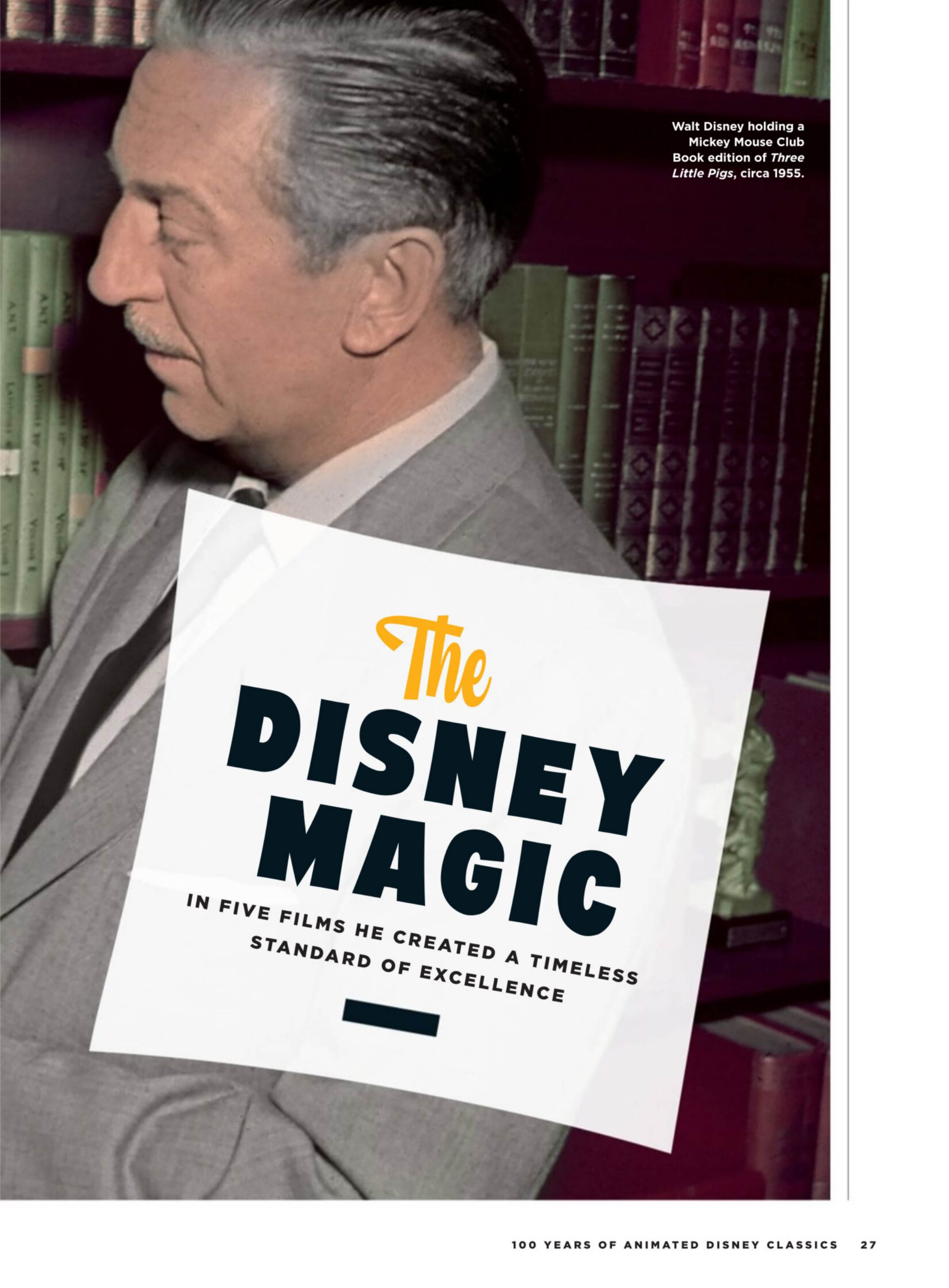
CHAPTER 2

The

PEAK

**THE APEX OF DISNEY'S
FILM ANIMATION**

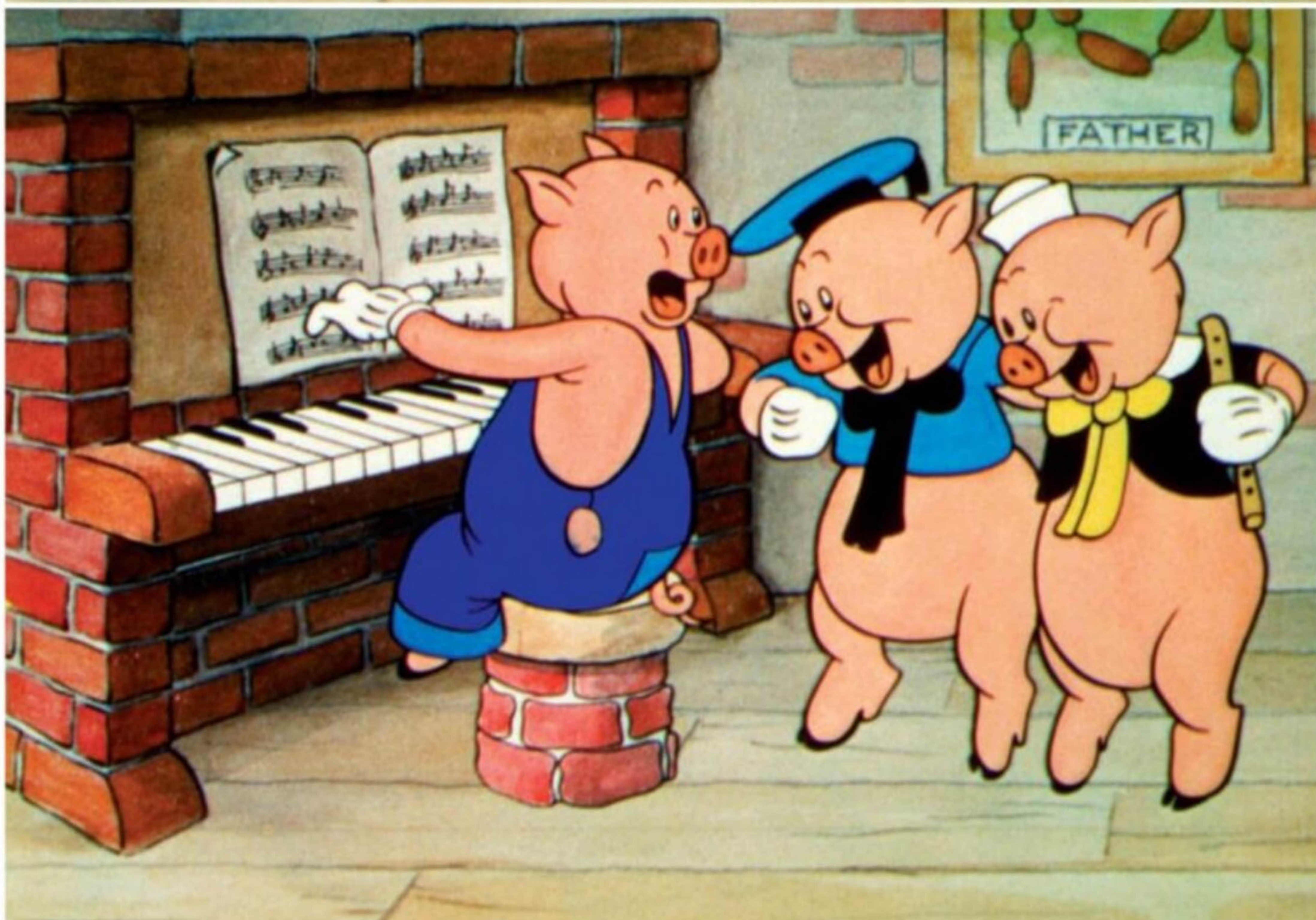




Walt Disney holding a
Mickey Mouse Club
Book edition of *Three
Little Pigs*, circa 1955.

The **DISNEY MAGIC**

IN FIVE FILMS HE CREATED A TIMELESS
STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE



In 1933 Walt Disney turned a classic fairy tale into a smash hit. *Three Little Pigs* made \$250,000 on a budget of \$22,000 and won the Oscar for best animated short. Most filmmakers would have been ecstatic, but Disney had much grander ambitions: He wanted to produce the first feature-length animated film.

As early as June 1932, Disney's brother and business partner, Roy Disney, had been looking for suitable material to turn into a feature. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was discussed, as was an adaptation of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*, a Felix Salten novel that had been published in Europe in the 1920s. *Gulliver's Travels* was also floated. Finally, Walt settled on *Snow White*. Disney later said he chose the fairy tale because "it was well-known and I knew I could do something with seven screwy dwarfs."

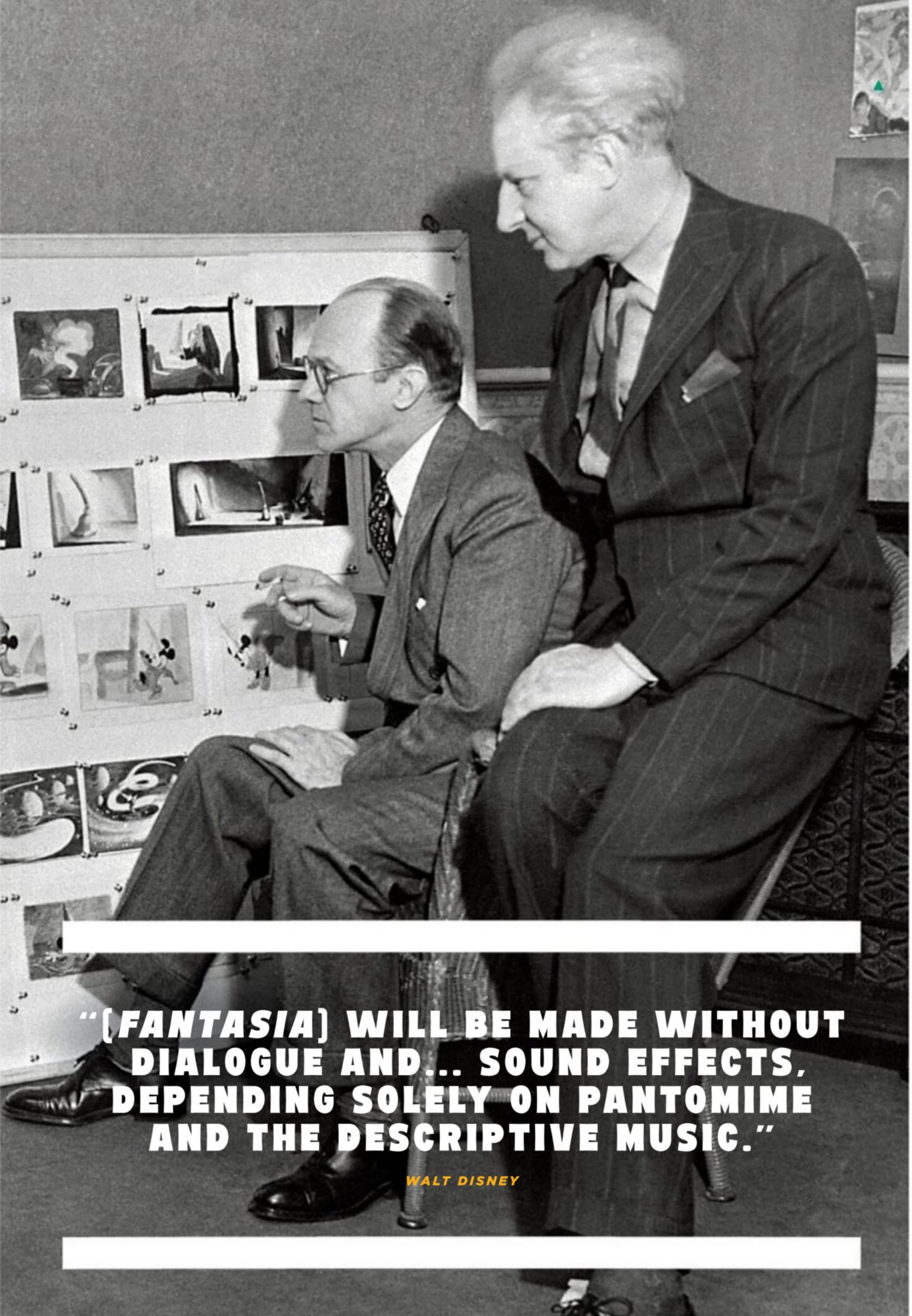
The story practically begged to be animated, with an evil queen, lightly anthropomorphized woodland creatures and songs. Bolstering Disney's confidence was the fact that he had already

The 1933 animated short *Three Little Pigs* (above), won Disney an Oscar. More important, its success spurred him to produce the first feature-length animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (right).



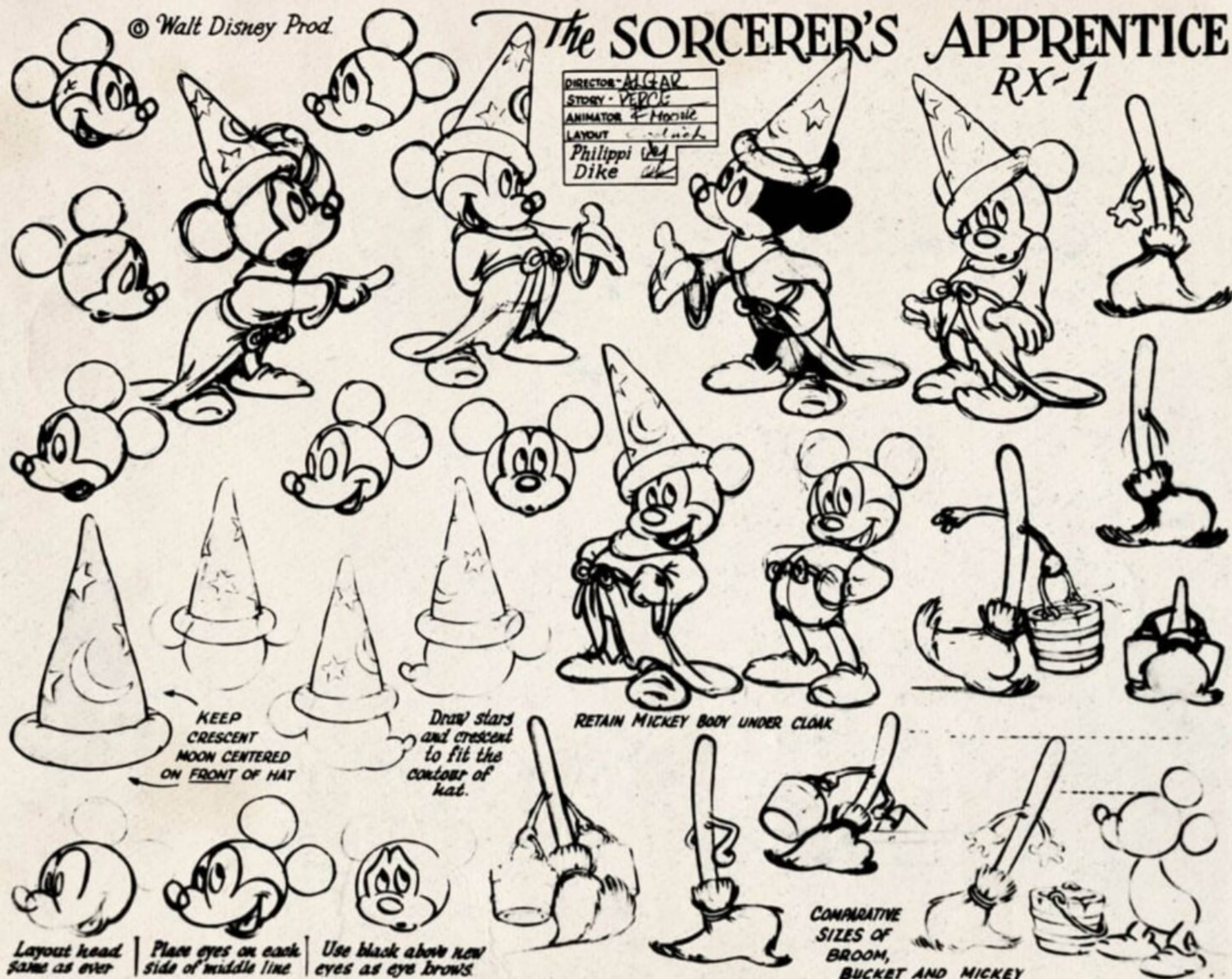
Disney discusses *Fantasia* with Deems Taylor (center), who chose the film's music, and conductor Leopold Stokowski (right).





**"[FANTASIA] WILL BE MADE WITHOUT
DIALOGUE AND... SOUND EFFECTS,
DEPENDING SOLELY ON PANTOMIME
AND THE DESCRIPTIVE MUSIC."**

WALT DISNEY



pioneered the blending of animation and music with his *Silly Symphonies* series of short films. Still, there were plenty of doubters. Around Hollywood, *Snow White* was dubbed “Disney’s Folly” due to the herculean amount of effort, money and time it took to bring the film to the screen.

For something that was completely unproven—feature-length animation—Disney strove for perfection. To achieve authenticity and realism, he filmed actors portraying Snow White and other characters to be used as the basis for the animators’ drawings. The animators were also instructed by traditional art professors, which was part of an effort to move away from the more

cartoony style of Disney’s short films. The movie utilized a new version of the multiplane camera as well, which gave the animation a feeling of depth and dimensionality. (Disney first tested it out on a short film called *The Old Mill*, which was released in November 1937 and won an Academy Award.)

When *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was released at the end of ’37, it was a smash. It won Walt Disney an honorary, full-sized Academy Award, along with seven smaller statues. From then on, Disney was *the* studio for animation.

For his follow-up, 1940’s *Pinocchio*, Disney pushed the realism further. He “cast” animators

A character model sheet for Mickey Mouse in “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” segment of 1940’s *Fantasia*.



like he would voice actors, and put an emphasis on effects animation—on the movement of everything in the film besides the characters, such as objects, vehicles, creatures and weather. He also utilized the multiplane camera to even greater effect; the long tracking shot that introduces Geppetto while Jiminy Cricket sings “When You Wish Upon a Star” was said to have cost \$50,000 alone.

From there, the complexity and ambition increased exponentially. *Fantasia*, released the same year as *Pinocchio*, was the ultimate animated art film, a mostly wordless musical collage that pushed the nascent format to the limit, utilizing

groundbreaking audio and visual techniques both in its production and presentation. (Now beloved, the film was at first a monumental flop, one that Disney openly apologized for indulging.)

Dumbo and *Bambi* followed, the last of the studio’s “big five.” Both were made on leaner budgets, but the results were still lively, emotionally resonant films that are today considered classics. After these triumphs, Disney’s personal interest in animation would drift, but the studio that carried his name continued to innovate. The hallmarks of a Disney animated film were now so firmly established, it didn’t require the man himself to carry on the tradition.

Disney drawing *Bambi* in 1941 with the help of a few models. *Bambi* was his fifth feature-length animated film.



The CLASSIC FILMS OF THE GOLDEN AGE

The first five feature films that Walt Disney Animation Studios produced are today considered essential viewing for anyone who loves movies. But in their own time they were leaps into the unknown—each one experimental, guided by Walt Disney’s imagination and the ingenuity of his animators. There was no template. The process of creating these films placed Disney in the workroom with his artists, “plussing” gags and hashing out sequences. The result: the invention of an entire industry.



SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

(1937)



THE STORY: Based on the 19th-century classic by the Brothers Grimm, it begins with the fair princess living with her wicked stepmother, the Queen. Absorbed by vanity and enraged that her sentient mirror named Snow White as the fairest of them all, the Queen attempts to kill her stepdaughter—who winds up in the care of the Seven Dwarfs, diminutive gem miners with distinctive personalities. What comes next is the stuff of fairy tales, both on the page and in cinematic lore.

THE BACKSTORY: With all eyes on the studio's most ambitious project to date, the Disney team labored for years to perfect *Snow White*. As recounted in *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, late in the process supervising director Dave Hand once scolded the animators for taking too long—their perfectionism was slowing things down too much. In the end, they all lived happily ever after.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: Clocking in at 83 minutes, the first animated feature film changed the industry overnight. What had once been derided as a “folly” became a sensation, one that still reverberates nearly a century later. While the picture's specific characters continue to be recognizable around the world, the film's wider influence is its ultimate legacy. Without Walt Disney's passion to make *Snow White*, who knows if anyone would have had the vision, bravery and clout to try anything like it?

Snow White took years to bring to the screen, but the effort was worth it. The picture was a runaway success at the box office, and is full of iconic characters and indelible moments.





PINOCCHIO

(1940)

THE STORY: Originally written by Italian author Carlo Collodi in serialized form in 1881, *Pinocchio* concerns an older woodworker named Geppetto who carves a marionette named Pinocchio to keep him company. When Pinocchio is brought to life by the Blue Fairy, he embarks on a strange and fantastical odyssey which includes a brief transformation into a donkey and being swallowed by a monstrous whale. If it sounds frightening, it is—and yet the tale is heartwarming as well.

THE BACKSTORY: *Pinocchio* endured a notoriously difficult production, with the movie being fully shut down at least once for a complete reworking. An early version of the film hewed closer to the idea of Pinocchio as a “puppet” with a coarse personality. He was then redesigned to be cuter and more outwardly “human.” Jiminy Cricket went through a similar overhaul after Disney had rejected the more lifelike version of the character in favor of a little man with a top hat.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: Following the enormous success of *Snow White*, Disney could have simply attempted to duplicate the formula. Instead, he pushed further, focusing his attention on effects and ambient animation—the way that water droplets fall or how a carriage moves along a rambling road. The resulting film is a staggering work of artistic prowess and emotional heft. Today, many animation enthusiasts and historians consider *Pinocchio* to be the greatest animated film of all time.

Rather than replicating the formula of *Snow White*, Disney pushed animation forward with *Pinocchio*.

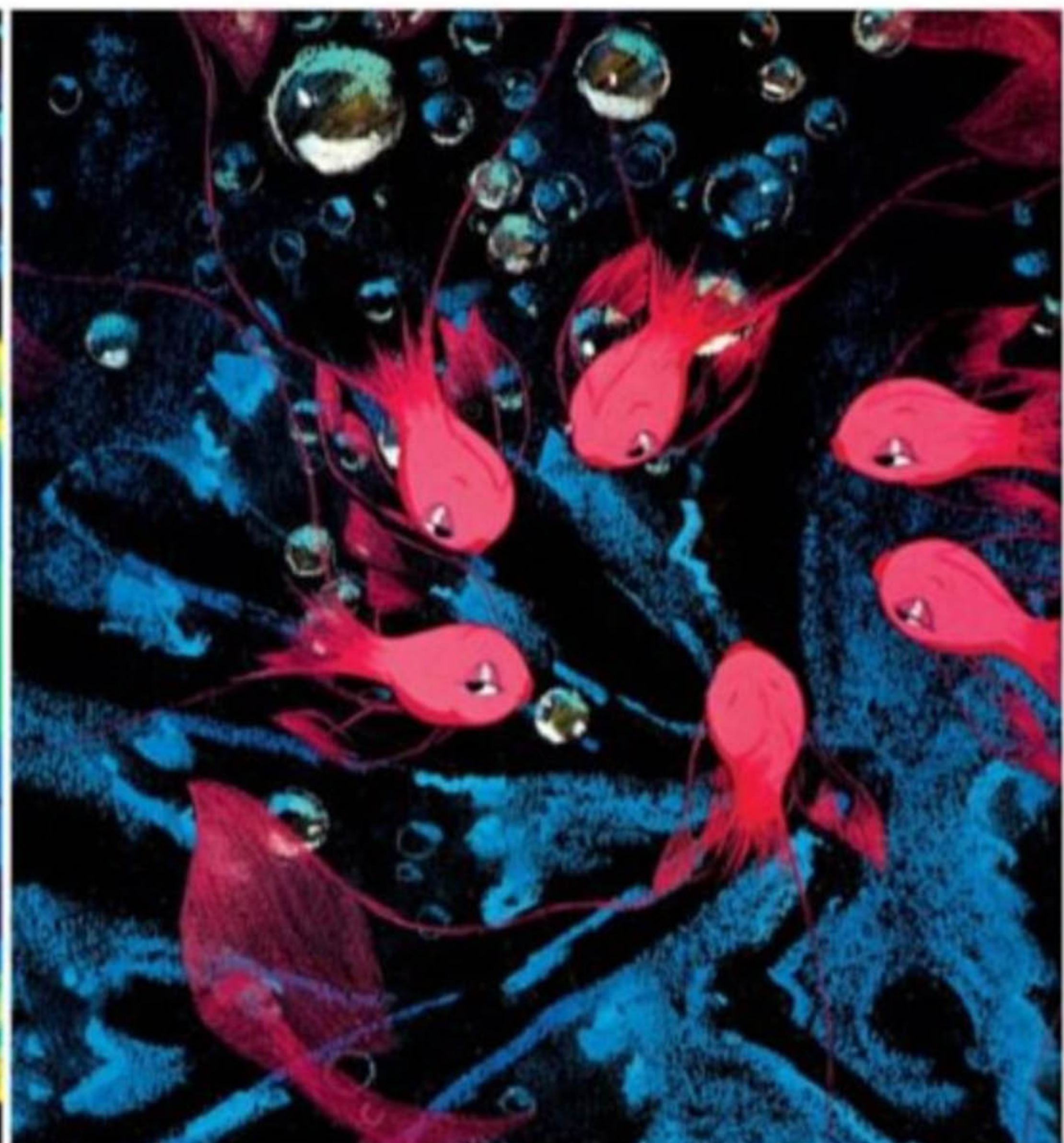
FANTASIA

(1940)

THE STORY: Originally titled *The Concert Feature*, the film is largely plotless—an experimental “anthology” set to classical pieces of music. The individual segments have loose storylines: “Dance of the Hours” is a comedic ballet; “Night on Bald Mountain” features a demon summoning ghouls to a volcanic mountaintop; and “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” stars Mickey Mouse as a magician’s helper who accidentally unleashes chaos.

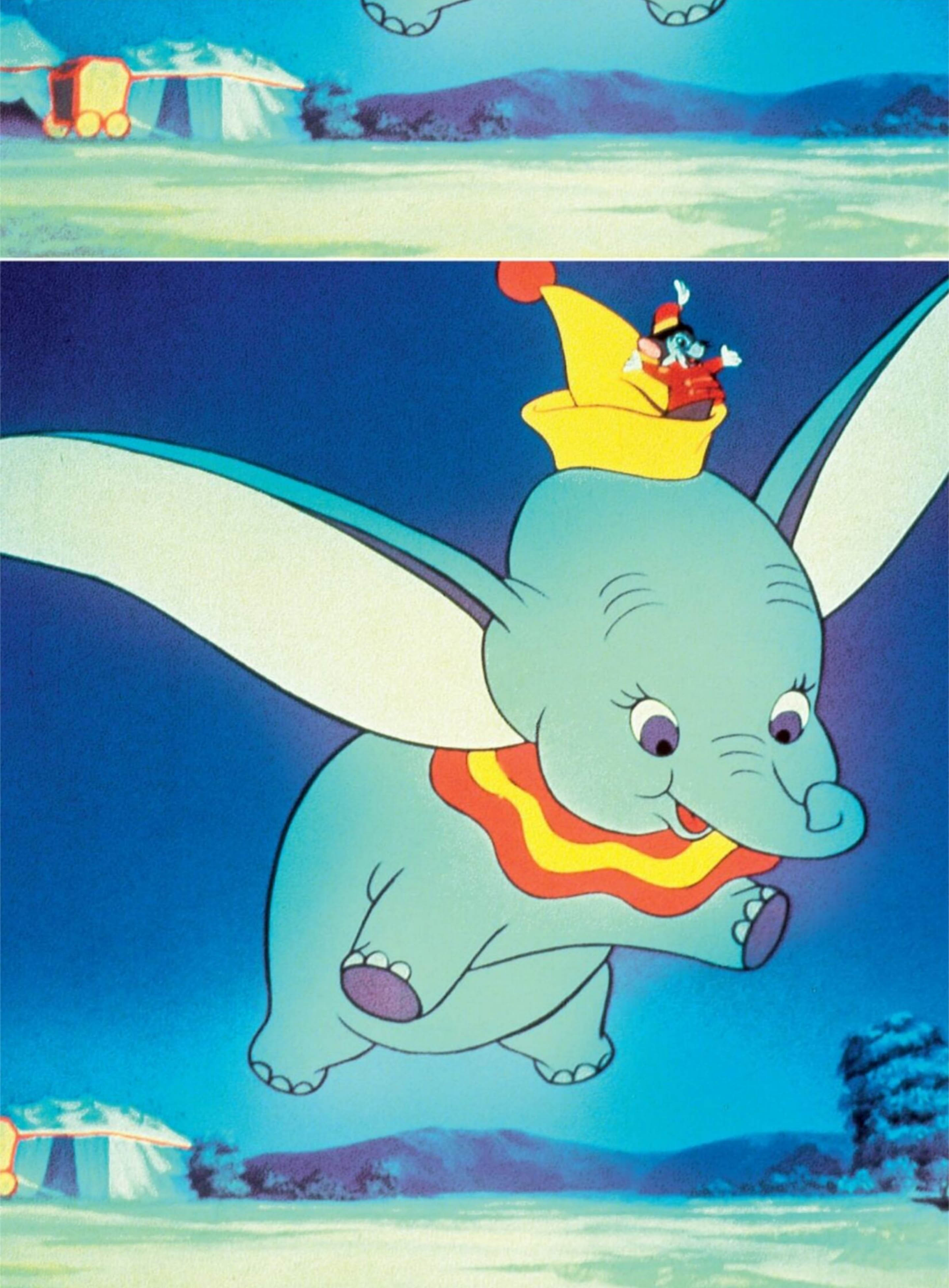
THE BACKSTORY: This was a passion project for Disney, one that eschewed the easy tropes of animation in favor of something grander, more abstract and more artistic: “The picture will be made without dialogue and without sound effects, depending solely on pantomime and the descriptive music,” he said before production.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: *Fantasia* was not for everyone. It was praised by critics, but flopped at the box office due to its long runtime and World War II. One of the film’s enduring legacies was its use of what was later called “Fantasound,” meant to replicate a live orchestra within a movie theater. Disney felt so strongly about the project that his intent was for new segments to be swapped in every few years—a vision that was honored in 1999 with the release of a sequel, *Fantasia 2000*.



Fantasia was Disney’s passion project. But audiences had a hard time digesting 126 minutes of mostly plotless animated experimentation—with images set to classical pieces of music—and it struggled at the box office.





DUMBO

(1941)

THE STORY: A baby elephant with giant ears is born at a circus in Florida, where hijinks and heartache ensue. At first a staple of the circus' sideshow, Dumbo eventually uses his ears to fly, leading to drunkenness, hallucinations of pink elephants and the influence of a mouse manager who wants to make him a star. Both joyous and deeply sad, *Dumbo* invites viewers to feel every emotion.

THE BACKSTORY: Disney originally gained the rights to the story in the late 1930s. After *Fantasia* underperformed at the box office, the studio decided to play it relatively safe, with a streamlined production that lacked the bells and whistles that had made prior films so special. Released just months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, *Dumbo* was a 64-minute crowd pleaser, brightly animated and well-received. Still, Disney downplayed its relevance, calling it "one of those little things that we knocked out between epics."

THE SIGNIFICANCE: There are some unfortunate elements associated with *Dumbo*—including a gang of jive-talking crows. From some who grew up on the film, there has been strong opposition to any attempts at rewriting history. The Walt Disney Company has tried to address these issues with disclaimers, including, "We can't change the past, but we can acknowledge it, learn from it and move forward together to create a tomorrow that today can only dream of." Despite the controversy, Pixar chief creative officer Pete Docter listed *Dumbo* as one of his top picks for greatest film of all time in a poll taken by the British Film Institute.

After *Fantasia's* flights of fancy, Disney simplified his approach to *Dumbo*—and created an enduring classic.



BAMBI

(1942)

THE STORY: The first act of *Bambi* is pure bucolic innocence. But generations of kids have been traumatized by the story's narrative shift, when the previously happy-go-lucky young deer stares helplessly from afar as his mother is shot down by a hunter. It's a landmark moment—one that bravely ventures to explore the often painful arc of life, death and the passage of time.

THE BACKSTORY: Disney had his eyes on animating the Austrian novel *Bambi: A Life in the Woods* even before *Snow White*, but it required patience to actually make it happen. First, he had to wait for original rightsholder MGM to give up on its plans for a live-action movie. Disney then purchased the movie rights, but production was slowed by an artists strike at the studio and then World War II. The result was a lean production, but a film powerful enough to strike a lasting chord with viewers.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: Perhaps the biggest technical contribution of *Bambi* was the idea that naturalism and exaggerated expressionism could exist side-by-side. The animals in the film have human voices and expressions, but move like actual animals—look at the sequence where Bambi is slipping on the ice. Paired with the painterly backdrops, it's an utterly spellbinding aesthetic for a story that later helped inspire *The Lion King*.

In *Bambi*, the animals had human voices and facial expressions, but still moved like animals within their beautifully rendered woodland world.





CHAPTER 3


Staying

TOP

THE SILVER AGE OF
DISNEY STUDIOS

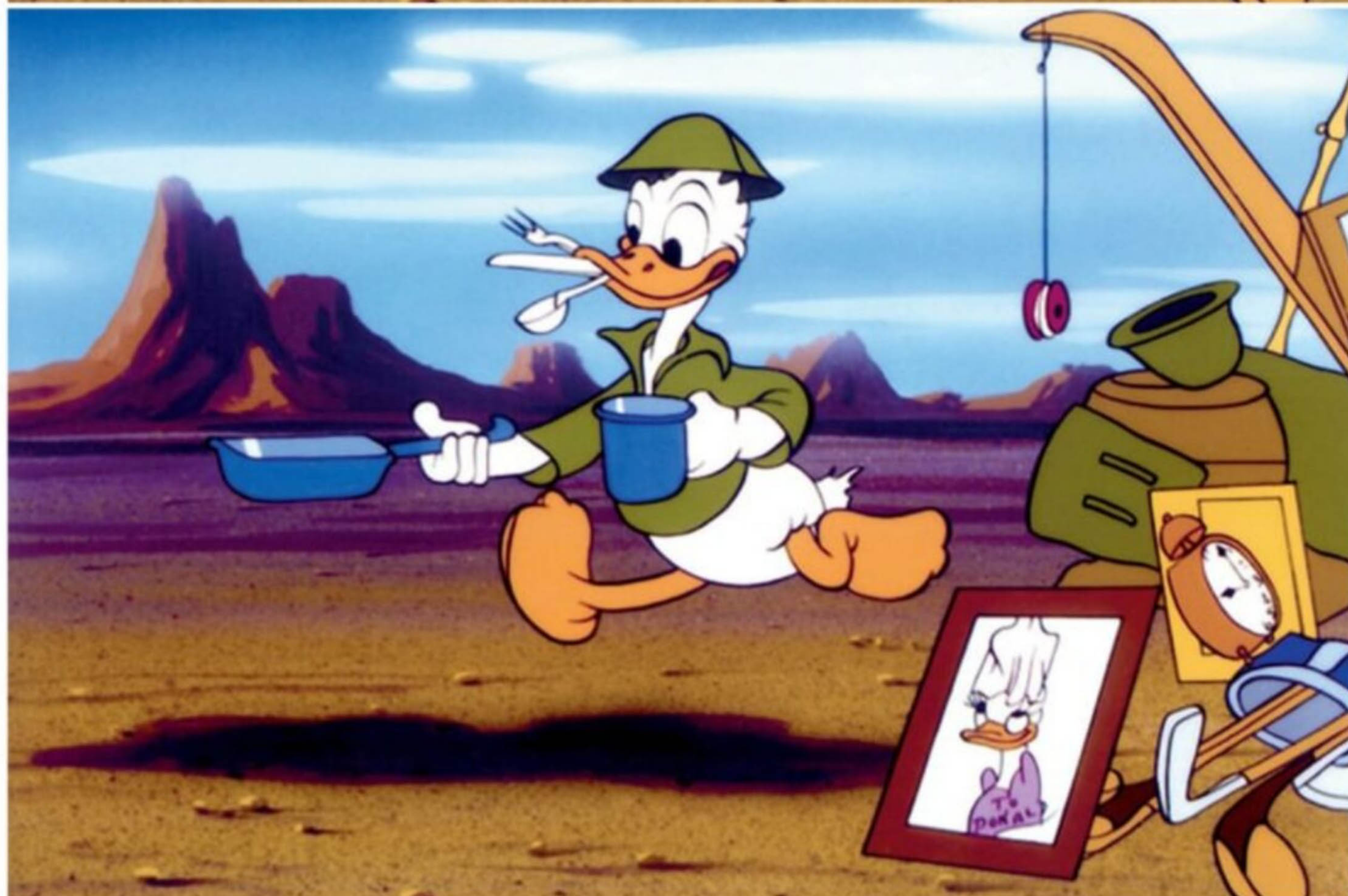
The POSTWAR YEARS

DISNEY HIT ITS STRIDE FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II
AND CREATED SOME OF ITS BEST-LOVED WORK



Holding a toy Donald Duck,
Walt Disney reads a book
version of his 1951 film, *Alice
in Wonderland*.





A

After *Bambi*, which had only been completed because of its shoestring budget and prewar start, the rest of the 1940s was not a particularly robust time for Walt Disney and feature-length animation. Like most business leaders in America, Disney found a way to contribute to the war effort—churning out a series of short “package films” for the U.S. government. This included two shorts that heavily featured Donald Duck and two more built around music. While charming diversions, they weren’t exactly sequels to *Fantasia*.

The war years also magnified a business problem for Disney’s studio that has often been forgotten—the excellence of Walt’s Golden Age films was a direct result of time-consuming and expensive overwork. It is generally accepted that three of Disney’s first five feature-length films—*Pinocchio*, *Fantasia* and *Bambi*—actually lost money during their initial theatrical runs. So, by 1950, even though Disney was eager to continue evolving animated features, he also needed to make sure his choices would guarantee box-office success.

Donald Duck in one of the short films that Disney produced for the government during World War II (above); Disney watching one of his artists at work on 1951’s *Alice in Wonderland* (right).







"IF CINDERELLA DOESN'T MAKE IT, WE'RE THROUGH!"

WALT DISNEY

Disney's first post-war feature was *Cinderella*—another fairy-tale adaptation. He was said to be less involved in the film's production, but arguably more vocal as a boss, reportedly telling his staff: "If *Cinderella* doesn't make it, we're through!"

Creatively, Disney spoke openly about his disappointment with *Cinderella* after its release. The film had been purposely produced without the abundance of resources in which his studio had indulged prior to the war and, to Disney's eyes, it showed. Audiences, on the other hand, did not seem to notice or care about any deficiencies. The movie was a smash.

Perhaps a coincidence—or maybe driven by self awareness and financial prudence—Disney's personal interest in animation began to wane as the 1950s progressed. That didn't mean he turned off his creativity; he just began looking for other ways to act on it.

First, he started thinking about live-action features. Then he turned his attention to both television and theme parks, which at the time were "new media." To give his company a head start on the competition, he smartly leveraged awareness of the Disney name and what it stood for, as well as his growing stable of beloved characters.

Disney himself hosted a TV show on ABC called *Walt Disney's Disneyland* that regularly featured the new California theme park he was in the process of building, also called Disneyland. It was brilliant content marketing before those words were widely used, and young baby-boomer children watching at home were soon dreaming

Disney in 1949 with Kathryn Beaumont, 11, the voice of the title character in *Alice in Wonderland*.



of one day visiting the place where their favorite movie stars actually lived.

Meanwhile, with *Cinderella* having established a new model for what “worked”—and without Walt’s watchful eyes always demanding that standards be raised rather than maintained—the Disney animation team hit its most productive stride.

The 1950s yielded *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan* and *Lady and the Tramp*. The studio closed the decade with *Sleeping Beauty*, another classic fairy tale and arguably the most stylistically ambitious Disney animated feature since *Fantasia*.

As the 1960s arrived, Disney’s interests splintered further. There was an expansion of California’s Disneyland, the 1964–65 World’s Fair in Queens, New York, and an increased interest in urban planning, which was sketched out as a futuristic city in Florida. Those last ideas were halted by Disney’s untimely death in 1966 at age 65—but they eventually took shape as Disney World.

After Disney’s death, Disney animation slipped into a fallow period that lasted nearly 20 years. It was during this time that fans would look back on the films of the company’s Silver Age and wonder if there would ever be anything like them again.

Disney in 1953 with *Lady and the Tramp* toys (above); and discussing *Sleeping Beauty* with animators (right).









The **CLASSIC FILMS OF THE SILVER AGE**

Disney's reputation for family entertainment blossomed during the 1950s—a decade of expansion for the company that gave baby boomers (and the world) *The Mickey Mouse Club* on TV, 17 live-action movies in theaters, and a string of animated features that may not have been as technically innovative or ambitious as the films that came before them, but were loved nonetheless.

CINDERELLA

(1950)

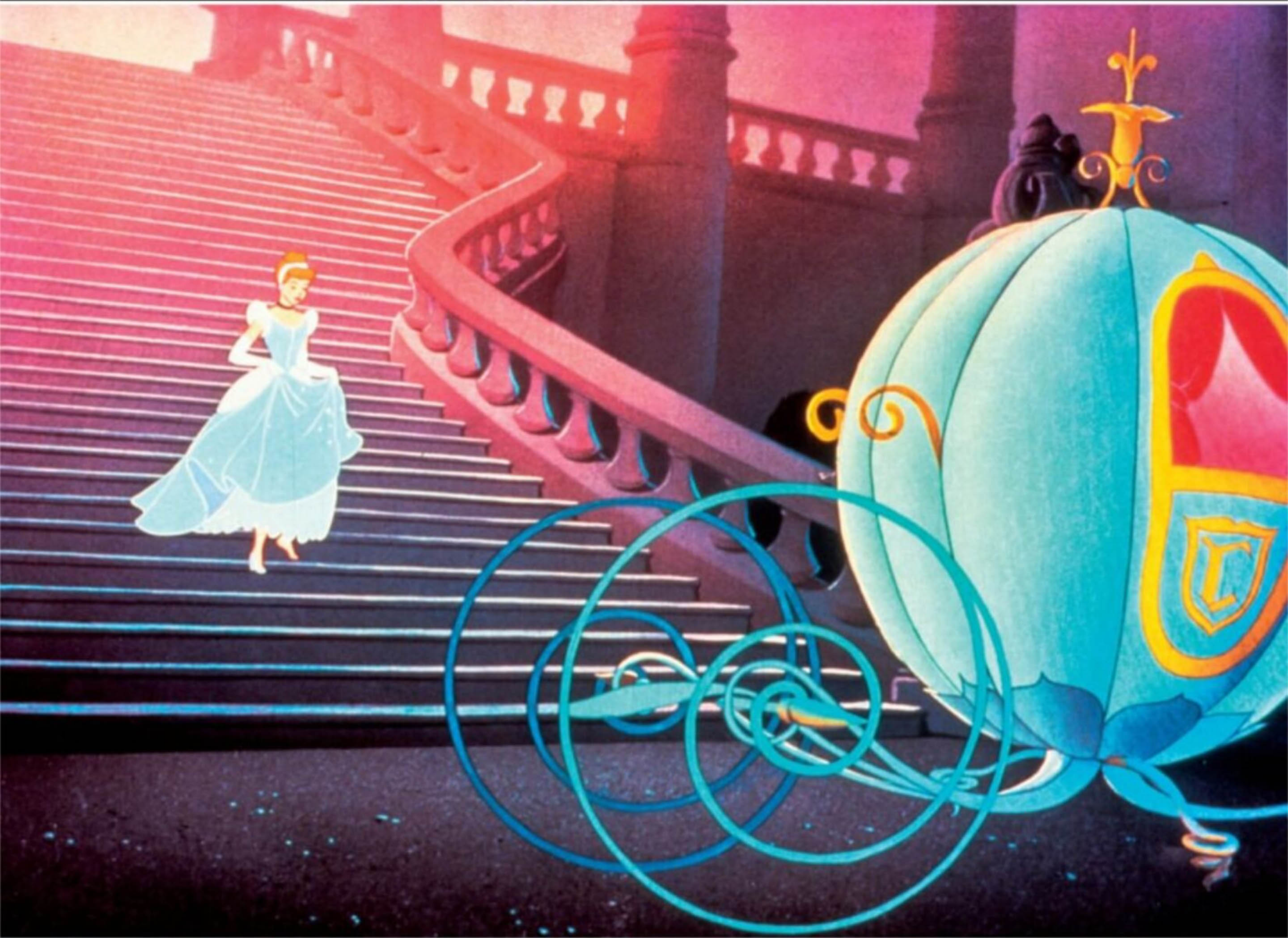


THE STORY: Based on a 17th-century French fairy tale, *Cinderella* follows a young woman who is forced to work in squalor by her stepmother, the cruel Lady Tremaine. Cinderella's misery is briefly alleviated by the sudden appearance of her fairy godmother. She's granted the opportunity to attend a grand ball up until the stroke of midnight, at which point she will lose her flowing gown. Forced to flee, she leaves behind a lone glass slipper—and a prince desperate to find its owner.

THE BACKSTORY: In desperate need of a hit, the studio turned to ideas originally conceived for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, including a subplot that involved a villainous cat chasing lovable mice. Legendary animator Ward Kimball was reportedly instructed by Disney to design the cat to look like Kimball's own calico. While far from the most artistically ambitious Disney animated feature, *Cinderella* is still hugely enjoyable. It's also influenced countless live-action rom-coms.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: It's not a stretch to say that *Cinderella* saved Disney, alleviating the financial pressures brought on by costly theatrical disappointments and World War II. The success gave Disney freedom for the rest of his life—and his company room to grow even after he was gone. Its importance is not lost on the modern Disney empire, either. There's a reason why the castle in the Magic Kingdom, modeled after the castle in this movie, is such a prominent part of the Disney iconography.

Disney was in desperate need of a hit after several box-office disappointments and the lean years of World War II. *Cinderella* delivered in a big way, saving the studio and giving the company room to grow.





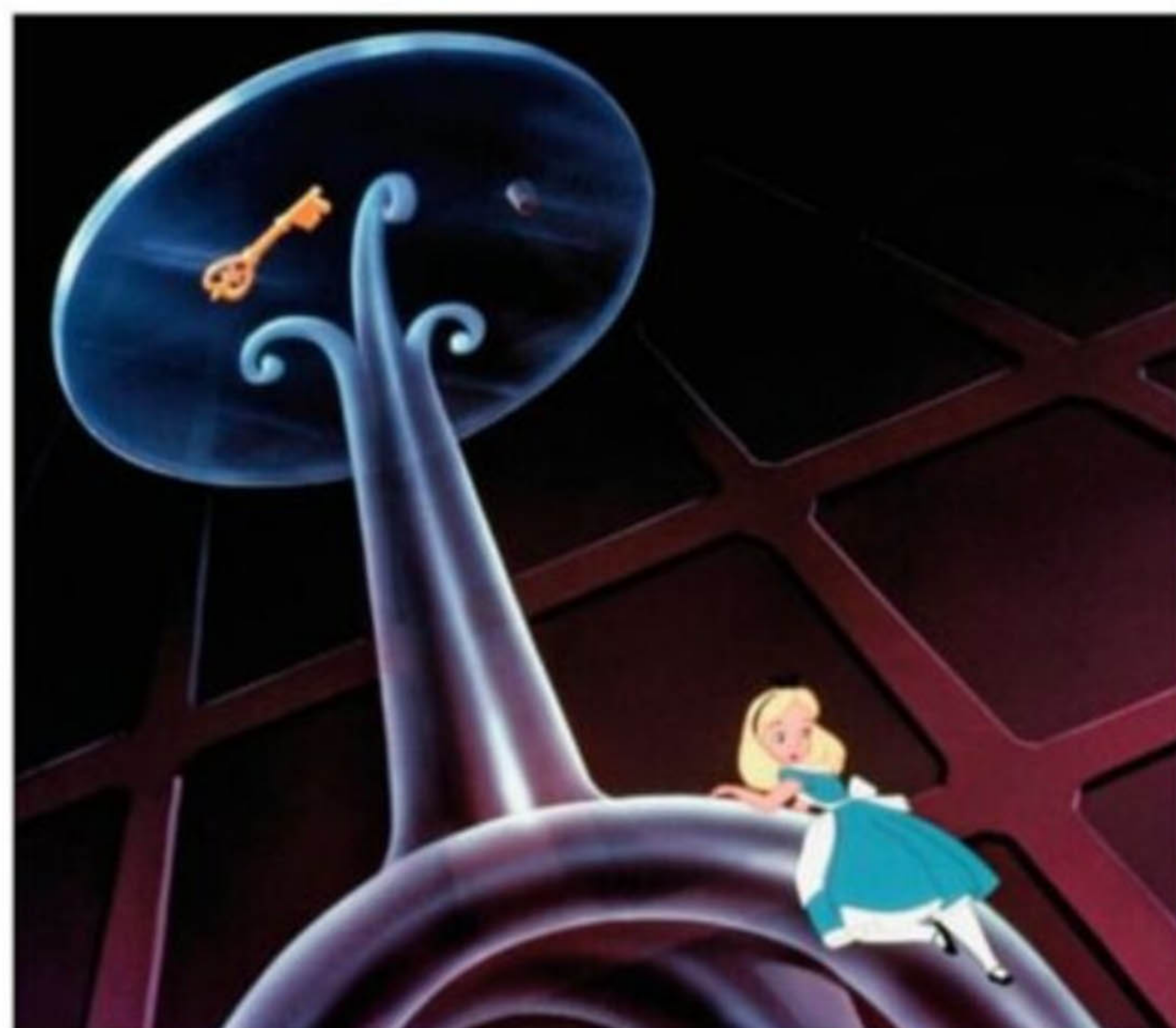
ALICE IN WONDERLAND

(1951)

THE STORY: Based on novels by Lewis Carroll, the film does away with the wordplay and gamesmanship of the books without sacrificing the trippy narrative. Alice follows the White Rabbit down a hole and into the strange world of Wonderland, where she encounters such crazy characters as the Mad Hatter and the lugubrious Caterpillar, and where she nearly loses her head on the orders of the vengeful Queen of Hearts.

THE BACKSTORY: Walt Disney first made his name in the 1920s working on the “Alice Comedies,” a series of hybrid shorts that combined live action and animation. In 1938, he bought the rights to Carroll’s novels but didn’t pursue turning them into a feature until after World War II. Along the way, there were numerous frustrations—including a rejected script by writer Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*), and many story artists who struggled to find a narrative to carry the film.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: Initially, *Alice* was met with critical indifference. It also underwhelmed at the box office. But audiences eventually caught up to the story and embraced it as another Disney classic. It helped that the film’s quirky characters and extravagant settings were perfectly suited to Disney’s fairy-tale theme parks, where they were given a heavy presence. For many, Disney’s version of *Alice in Wonderland* is far more familiar than Carroll’s original source material.



The Disney version of Lewis Carroll’s original books did away with their wordplay, but leaned into the surrealistic elements of their stories. The result was a classic.

PETER PAN

(1953)

THE STORY: Based on J.M. Barrie's stage play and stories, *Peter Pan* follows the Darling children as they are whisked away by the impish title character. Their flight through the London night leads them to fantastical adventures in Neverland, where they meet mermaids, get captured by natives and are pursued by the villainous pirate, Captain Hook.

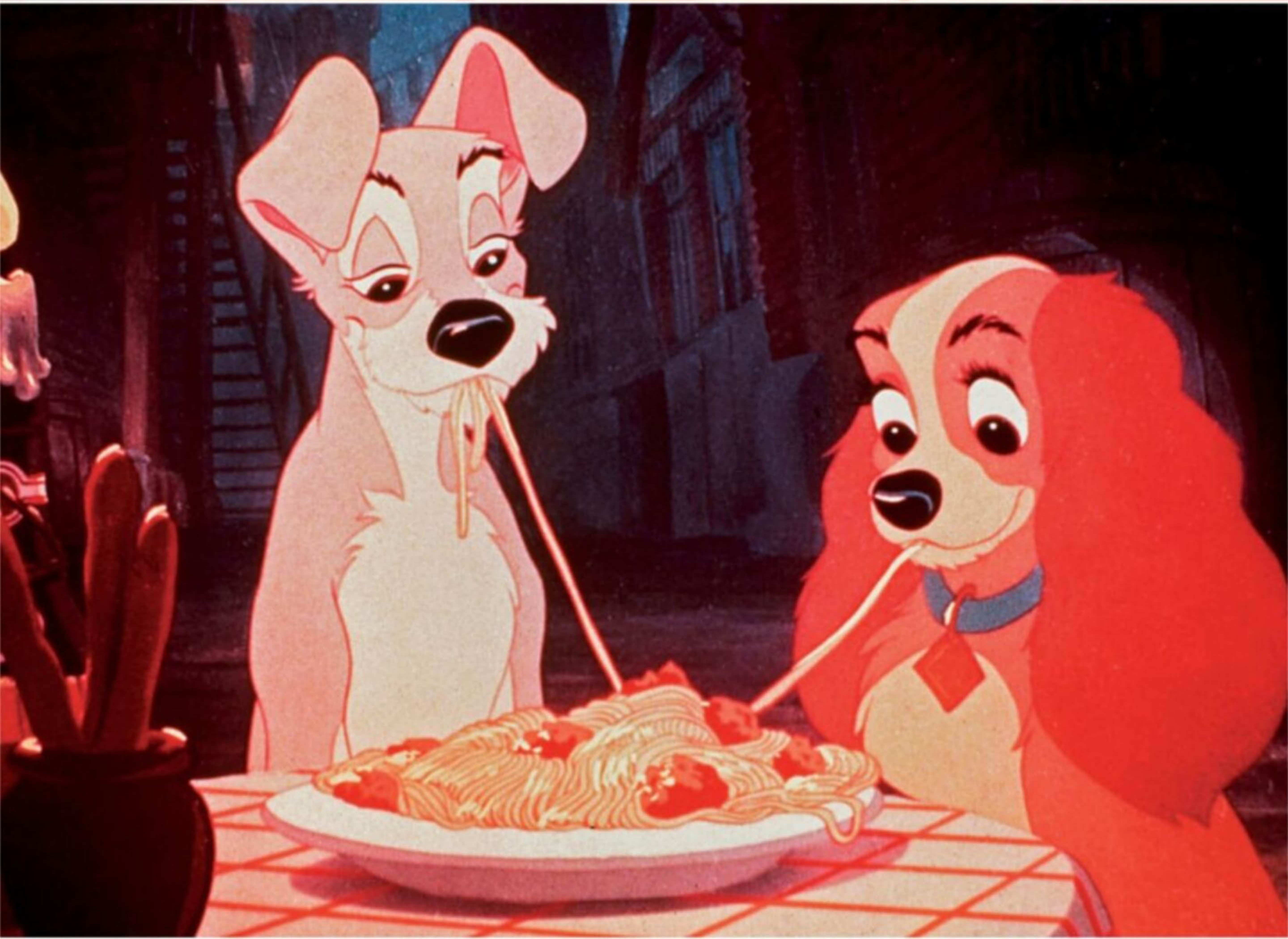
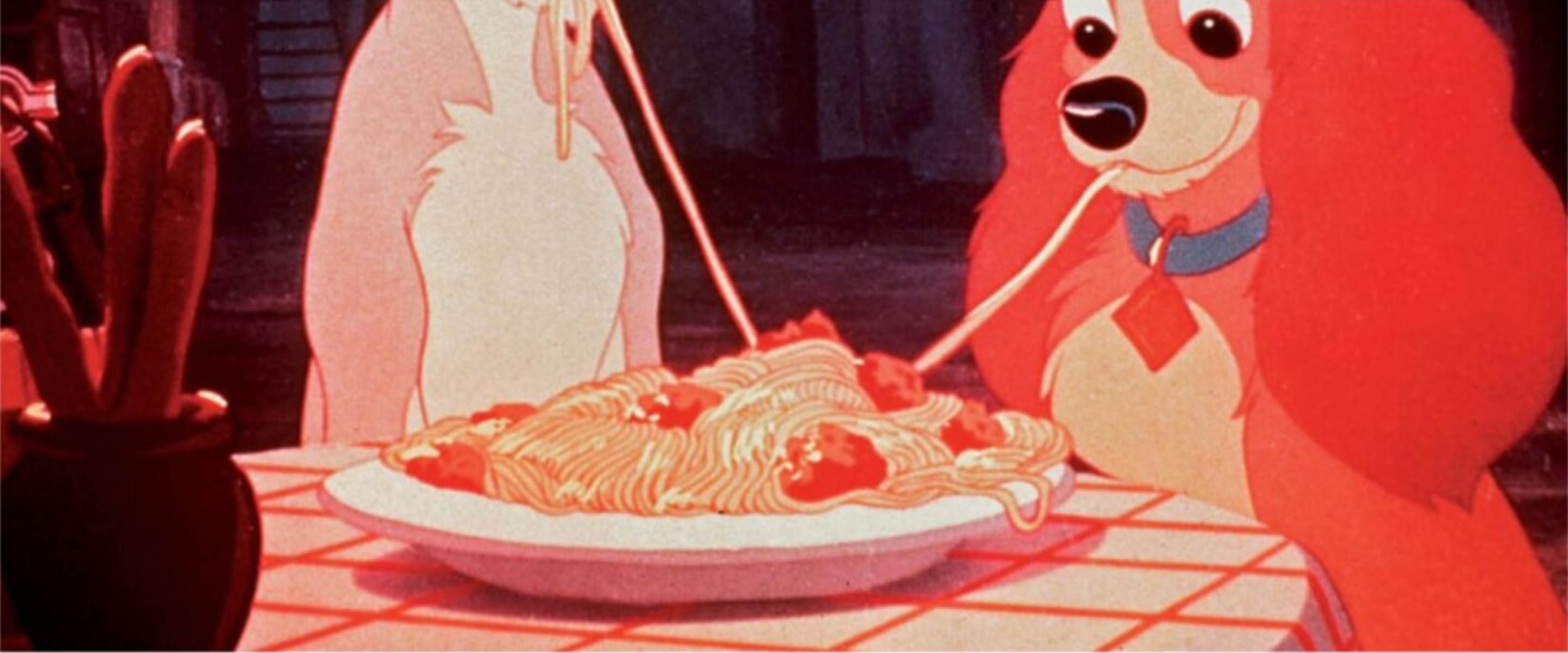
THE BACKSTORY: Like *Cinderella*, an entire live-action version of *Peter Pan* was filmed on the Disney Studios stages for reference, with many of the actors who voiced the roles playing the same characters. Pulled in many directions, Disney's direct input was sometimes hard to parse; the characterization of Hook, for instance, was a constant subject of debate. No matter—the movie turned out well and Disney was happier with it than most other productions of the era.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: *Peter Pan* is another Disney classic marred by unfavorable and stereotypical depictions of some ethnic groups. Yet, paradoxically, much of the movie—including its springy animation and cheerful attitude—has actually aged better than most Disney films of the era. *Peter Pan* was also immortalized with a Disneyland attraction (Peter Pan's Flight, a rail-suspended dark ride) that's been duplicated around the world.

Peter Pan leads the Darling children on their nighttime flight through London to Neverland.









LADY AND THE TRAMP

(1955)

THE STORY: In the 1930s, legendary story artist Joe Grant pitched a film about how his English springer spaniel (named Lady) had felt slighted by the arrival of his new baby. Years later, Grant's pitch was fused with a story published in *Cosmopolitan* called "Happy Dan, the Cynical Dog." The haughty Lady feels left out by the arrival of a new baby—but finds love with the rascally Tramp.

THE BACKSTORY: After *Peter Pan*, Disney wanted to make something on the cheap. He considered scrapping this project altogether, but his brother Roy talked him out of it. With competitors looking to take slices out of Disney's share of the animation pie, Walt did a complete 180. Instead of pinching pennies, he decided to go big on *Lady and the Tramp*.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: This was the first animated feature filmed in CinemaScope, a distinction that added millions of dollars in production costs and caused the movie to miss its original release date. Still, the investment paid off. The visuals are gorgeous and the characters (modeled, once again, on real dogs and cats) are full of life and personality.

With *Lady and the Tramp*, Disney proved that it was unmatched at giving life and personality to animal characters. And not only is the movie engaging and entertaining, but it also looks beautiful.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

(1959)

THE STORY: Princess Aurora is a miracle child to the King and Queen of a magical land. But when sorceress Maleficent, the self-identified Mistress of All Evil, places a curse on the young child, Aurora is sent into hiding under the watchful eye of three benevolent fairies. After Aurora falls into a deep sleep, it's up to a cunning prince to stop Maleficent and bring Sleeping Beauty back to life.

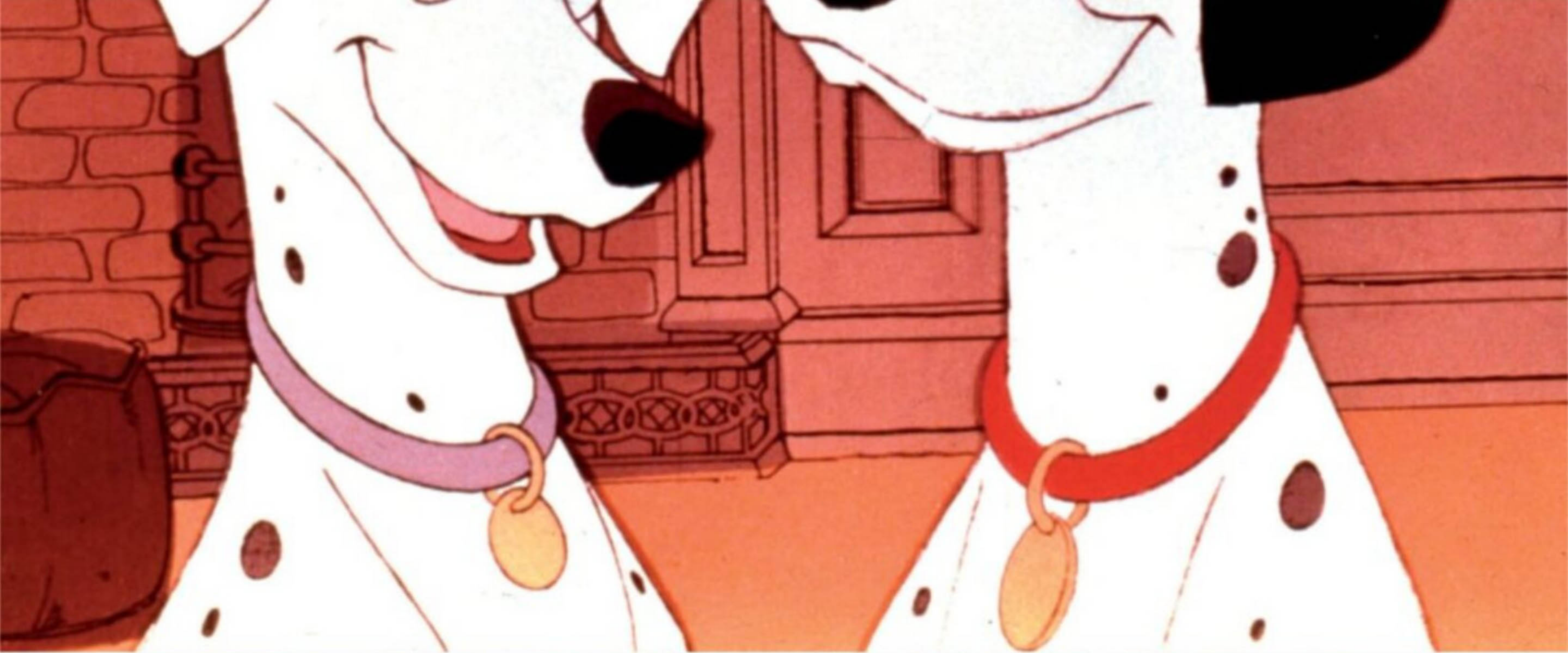
THE BACKSTORY: Having wanted to tell this story since the early 1930s, Disney was obsessed with creating what he had envisioned as “a moving illustration.” Animators spent years refining it, yet when the film finally opened, it underperformed commercially and critically. (*Time* magazine’s review called the movie’s drawing “a compromise between sentimental, crayon-book childishness and the sort of cute, commercial cubism that tries to seem daring but is really just square.”) According to those close to Disney, the general indifference soured the original imaginer on animation.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: *Sleeping Beauty* was the first animated feature to be filmed in the Super Technirama 70 wide-screen process. It was the only way to capture the movie’s lush visual opulence, but it also created much more work for Disney’s animators, who had to fill pieces of paper the size of bedsheets. The arduous and expensive production resulted in a movie aesthetically unlike any other.

To create *Sleeping Beauty*’s lush visuals, Disney’s animators filled pieces of paper the size of bedsheets.







ONE HUNDRED AND ONE DALMATIANS

(1961)

THE STORY: Based on the 1956 children's novel by Dodie Smith, the story follows dalmatians Pongo and Perdita, two generous dogs who produce 15 pups and then adopt 84 more. Their idyllic (if chaotic) life is turned upside down by Cruella de Vil (voiced by actress Betty Lou Gerson channeling Bette Davis), who wishes to turn the dogs into a luxurious fur coat.

THE BACKSTORY: Unlike many Disney adaptations, this one had a relatively quick transition from the source material to the movie. And, once again, a recent failure—this time it was *Sleeping Beauty*—had put the company's animated output in jeopardy. *Dalmatians* had to deliver.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: In the late 1950s, Ub Iwerks began experimenting with Xerox technology to transpose drawings directly onto film cels, forgoing the usual process of having the lines inked over by artists in another department. The process made sense to try on *Dalmatians* given all those dogs and all their spots. The resulting movie has a distinct texture that is perfect for the material.



Based on a 1956 children's novel, *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* was another movie that had to deliver at the box office for Disney, which was coming off the disappointing performance of *Sleeping Beauty*.

THE JUNGLE BOOK

(1967)



THE STORY: Based on Rudyard Kipling's stories, the film follows young Mowgli, an orphaned "man cub" growing up in the jungle. Mowgli strikes up a friendship with a joyful bear named Baloo and a panther named Bagheera, though he must stay vigilant against the fearsome tiger Shere Khan—who has a real appetite for orphaned man cubs. Punctuated by some of the period's very best Disney songs, it's easy to understand why *The Jungle Book* is a favorite for so many.

THE BACKSTORY: The studio first developed a version of the movie that hewed more closely to Kipling's stories in both tone and format, which is certainly not what this wound up being. It was Disney who suggested the movie focus more closely on Mowgli. But not all of his suggestions were winners. For example, the buzzards look and sound like the Beatles but sing barbershop quartet songs—that's because the Beatles turned down an offer to voice the characters, and Disney went instead with a more timeless sound.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: *The Jungle Book* was being produced while Disney was sick—he'd had to have a full lung removed during production. It was the last animated feature that he worked on personally, and he died less than a year before the movie opened. For many Disney animators, as well as knowledgeable fans, *Jungle Book* is the film that marks the end of an era.

Made during the last years of Disney's life, *The Jungle Book* is seen by fans and animators as the end of an era. It also includes some of the studio's best songs.



CHAPTER 4

Dawn of a

NEW
ERA

**HOW A DOWNTURN
LED TO A RENAISSANCE**





The **REVIVAL YEARS**

LOST AND FACING ITS LOWEST POINT, DISNEY
ANIMATION FOUND ITS WAY BACK TO THE TOP

With 1989's *The Little Mermaid*, Disney animation began to emerge into the light once again.







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When Walt Disney died at the end of 1966, there wasn't a single unit of the company that was more significantly impacted than the feature animation department. And even though prior to his death he'd been spending more of his time working on theme parks, the 1964 World's Fair and live-action movies, his contributions to Disney's animated features were still invaluable. Take *The Jungle Book*, the last animated feature on which he worked: When the film was going in a direction that Disney felt was too dark, he steered the story toward the cheerier version we all know today.

After *Jungle Book*, the studio churned out forgettable features that failed to keep up with the sensibilities of modern audiences. It would only get worse as Disney entered the 1980s. *The Fox and the Hound*, released in 1981, and *The Black Cauldron*, released in '85, were attempts to revive past glory, but both were disappointments.

When Frank Wells and Michael Eisner were installed as the new leaders of Disney in 1984, they decided to reinforce Disney's commitment to animated films. They tasked Jeffrey Katzenberg, an executive who had worked for Eisner at Paramount, with rejuvenating the unit even though he had never worked in animation before and had no idea how to do it. He soon figured it out.

Eleven months before he died, Disney appeared in the 1966 Rose Parade in Pasadena, California.



EISNER WAS DETERMINED TO BRING THE LUSTER BACK TO DISNEY ANIMATION.

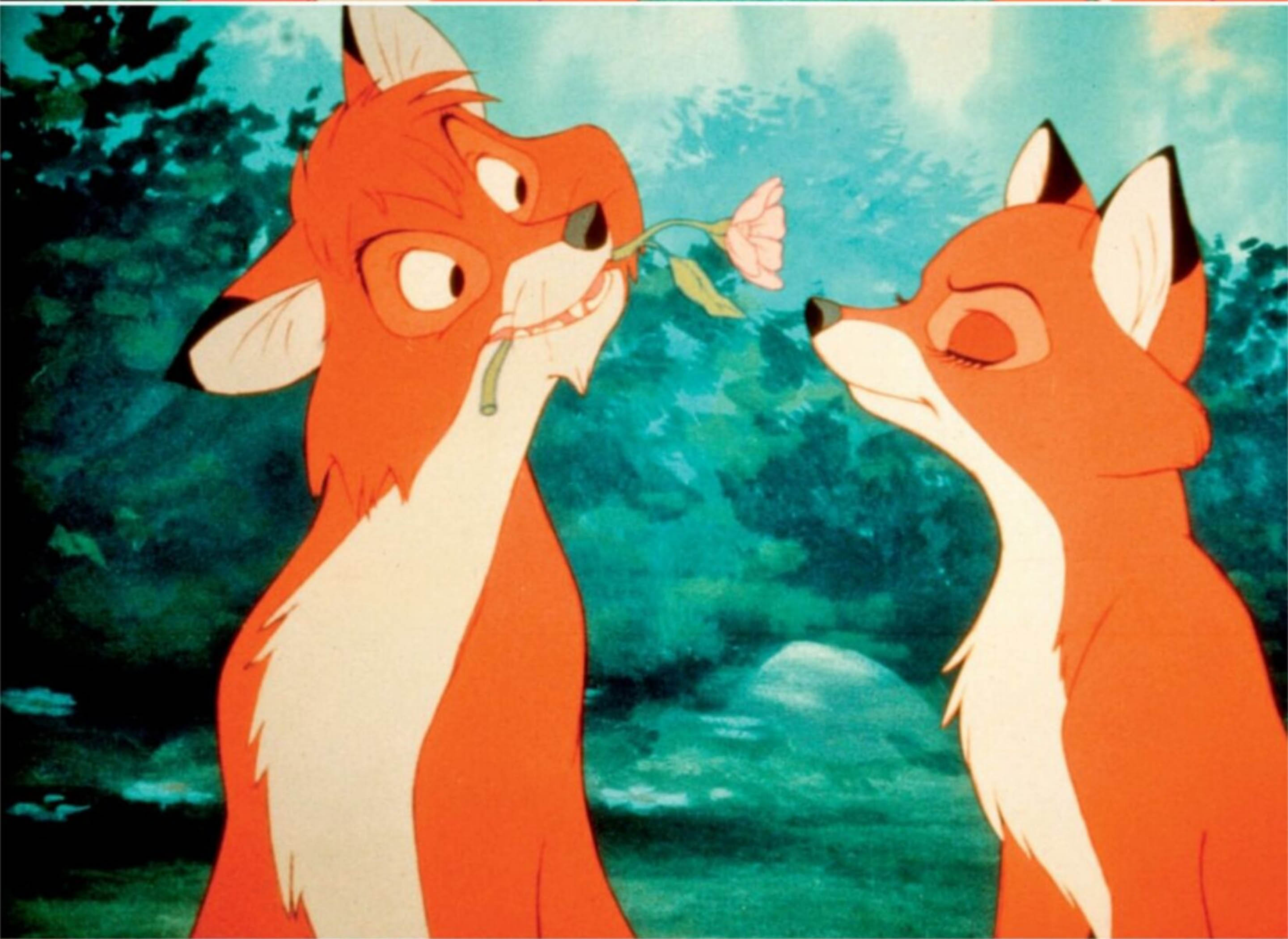
In a famous 1988 interview for TV's *60 Minutes*, Eisner previewed footage from the upcoming release *Oliver & Company* and reaffirmed his commitment to animated features—as expensive and time-consuming as they were. “We have to do them,” he said. Why? Because the company’s legacy was built upon them. Eisner was determined to bring the luster back to Disney animation.

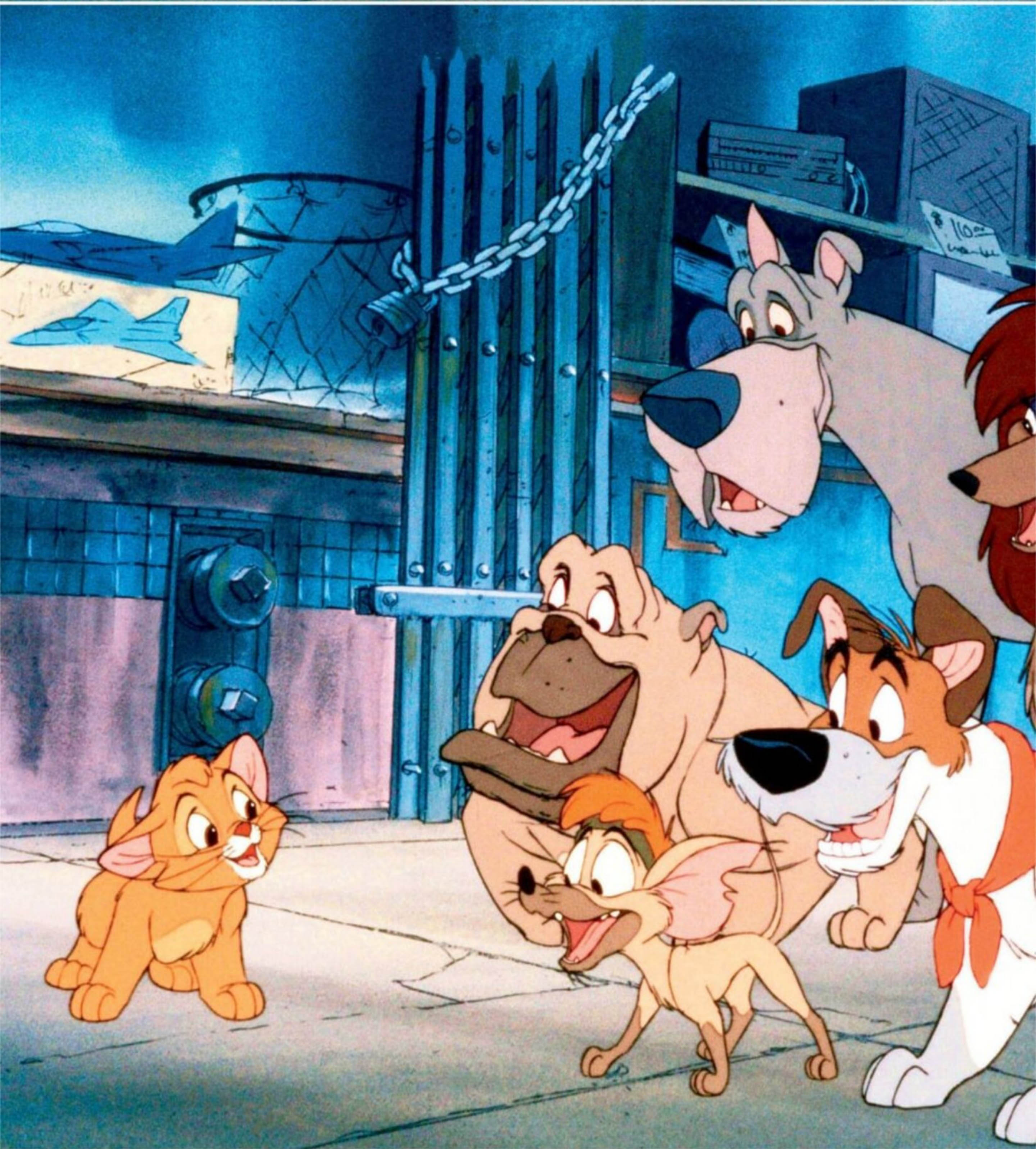
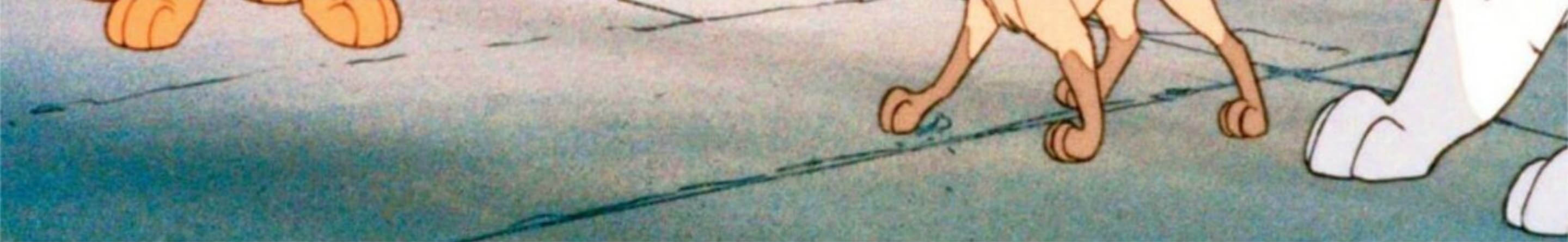
Oliver & Company wasn’t a hit, but it was a step in the right direction. It was hip and fun, with a voice cast of recognizable talent and, perhaps most crucially, a song (“Once Upon a Time in New York City”) written by Howard Ashman, a lyricist who would have a profound impact on what would be referred to as the Disney Renaissance.

The decade closed with the film that reestablished what a Disney animated movie could achieve. Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker, *The Little Mermaid* was an affirmation that Disney animation had—like *Sleeping Beauty*—only been dormant. It was the beginning of a long run of success.

Popular animated films once again became the creative fuel that kept the “Disney machine”

Neither 1985's *The Black Cauldron* (above) nor 1981's *The Fox and the Hound* (right) returned Disney animation to its former glory—but the studio refused to give up.





DISNEY'S ANIMATED FILMS HAD BECOME, ONCE AGAIN, THE COMPANY'S CROWN JEWEL.

operational. Disney was able to harness the power and appeal of these stories across an ever-expanding empire that included at-home media, merchandise and—of course—Disney's theme parks and attractions.

Walt Disney would have been proud. This was the vision he had worked so hard to achieve, overcoming all setbacks and failures that stood in his way. As for Disney's millions of fans, it all felt comfortable and right. They wanted new fairy tales to believe in, too—for themselves and for future generations to share.

And for those who remembered the Golden and Silver ages of Disney animation, the modern movies tapped into their feelings of nostalgia. Disney's animated films had become, once again, the company's crown jewel—more than 20 years after Disney's death. And not a moment too soon.

As for the future? Inevitably the path forward has not been without missteps and mistakes—as has always been the case. But it's entirely likely that Disney will find its way. Walt's company is in the dream business. And dreams have always been the stuff of precious, mystical magic that gives us hope.

Released in 1988, *Oliver & Company* wasn't a hit for Disney—but it was a step in the right direction.



For more than 50 years, the company founded by Walt Disney had survived its share of hardships—moments when all hope appeared to be lost. Usually everyone rallied to these challenges. But by the 1980s, the situation seemed more dire.

With corporate raiders lurking, ready to sell the company for parts—and without Walt's creative vision and will to see it through—what Disney needed most was strong leadership.

So, in 1984, the company's board of directors brought in two outside executives to save the day: Michael Eisner and Frank Wells. To turn things around, they made a commitment to producing animated features, despite the fact that audiences—especially children—now seemed to prefer Luke Skywalker and E.T. to Peter Pan and Pinocchio.

Young executive Jeffrey Katzenberg partnered with Roy E. Disney, Walt's nephew, to spearhead what came to be known in Hollywood as the Disney Renaissance—an era that merged fresh ideas with established standards to produce new animated classics.

The CLASSIC FILMS OF THE MODERN AGE





THE LITTLE MERMAID

(1989)



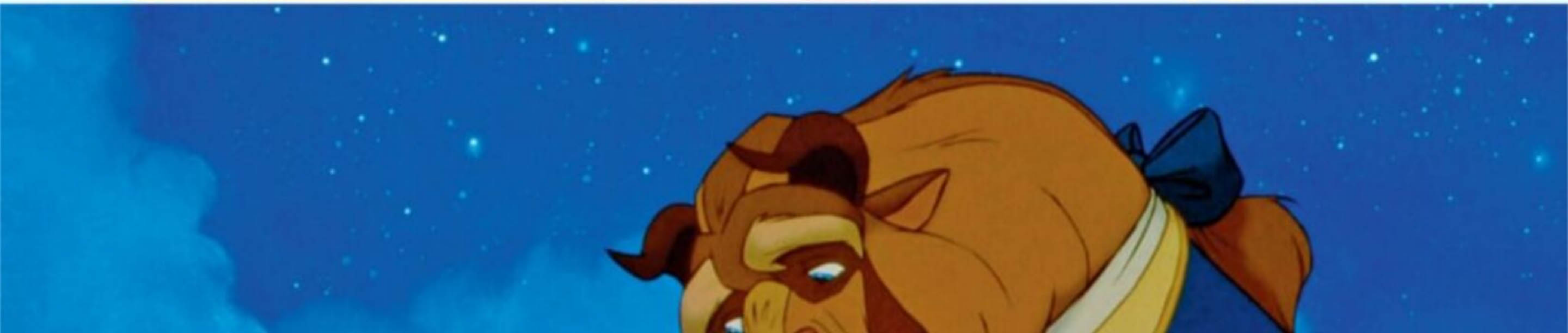
THE STORY: Adapted from the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, *The Little Mermaid* follows Ariel, a mermaid who longs for adventure. When she saves a human prince named Eric, she believes her destiny is to join him on land. To make that wish come true, she makes a Faustian bargain with an evil sea witch named Ursula, who gives Ariel legs in exchange for her voice—and the possibility of losing everything.

THE BACKSTORY: Walt Disney himself had flirted with the idea of adapting the Andersen story and, as they say at Disney, no good idea goes away. Directors Ron Clements and John Musker pitched an adaptation to Jeffrey Katzenberg during one of his infamous “Gong Show” sessions, in which filmmakers had just a moment to explain an idea before being told to move it forward or, well, you know. Katzenberg initially gonged this one on the grounds that it was too similar to Disney’s recent live-action hit *Splash*. Wisely, he reconsidered.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: With songs by Broadway legends Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, *The Little Mermaid* launched the modern age of Disney animation. Not only did the duo write great music, but they also contributed to the story and brought to life characters and environments that expanded to touch musical stages and Disney theme parks, as well as generating revenue in the “new” at-home market—meaning all those DVDs and VHS tapes.

With memorable and engaging characters complemented by an undeniably great collection of songs by lyricist Howard Ashman and composer Alan Menken, *The Little Mermaid* rejuvenated Disney animation.





BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

(1991)

THE STORY: Based on a European folktale about a young woman in a provincial French town held prisoner by a brutish Beast... with whom she falls in love. The castle where Belle is confined is full of enchanted objects—the spell that had turned a prince into a beast had also turned his staff into household objects. Complicating matters is the fact that Belle is also being courted by a vain hunter named Gaston.

THE BACKSTORY: Disney's first stab at an adaptation was something of a drag. (It's now a curio confined to some video releases.) With time running out, new directors Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise turned to lyricist Howard Ashman and composer Alan Menken, the team that had helped save *The Little Mermaid*. Much of the story work was done near Ashman's home in upstate New York as he gradually succumbed to complications from the AIDS virus. He died at age 40 on March 14, 1991, six months before the movie's release.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: Despite Ashman's death, there was still a happy ending. It began with a rapturous response to a work-in-progress screening of *Beauty and the Beast* at the New York Film Festival. The screening was unprecedented for a company that had always kept its creative process a closely guarded secret. Critics loved it, as did audiences, and *Beauty and the Beast* became the first animated feature to receive an Oscar nomination for best picture.



The response to *Beauty and the Beast* was overwhelmingly positive from both critics and audiences. It became the first animated movie to receive an Academy Award nomination for best picture.

ALADDIN

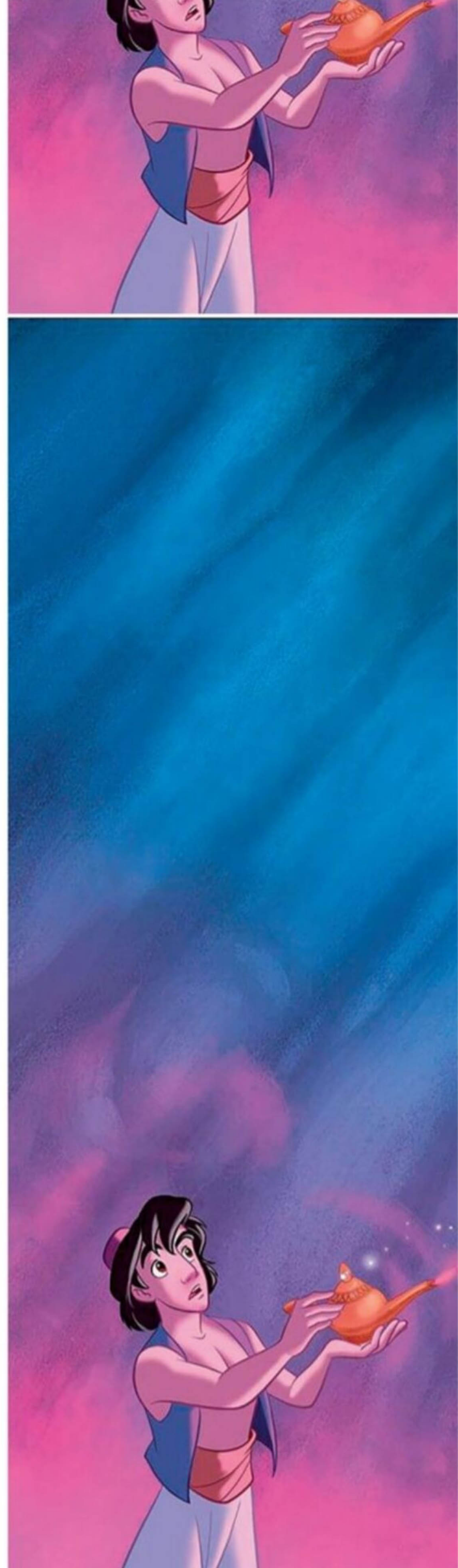
(1992)

THE STORY: Based on *One Thousand and One Nights*, a Middle Eastern folktale, *Aladdin* is a cautionary tale of wish fulfillment. The title character is a charming “street rat” who falls in love with a princess, runs afoul of a villainous vizier and finds a magic lamp. After he rubs the lamp, a loquacious genie (voiced by Robin Williams) pops out, granting his wishes but furthering his entanglements with both the princess and the vizier.

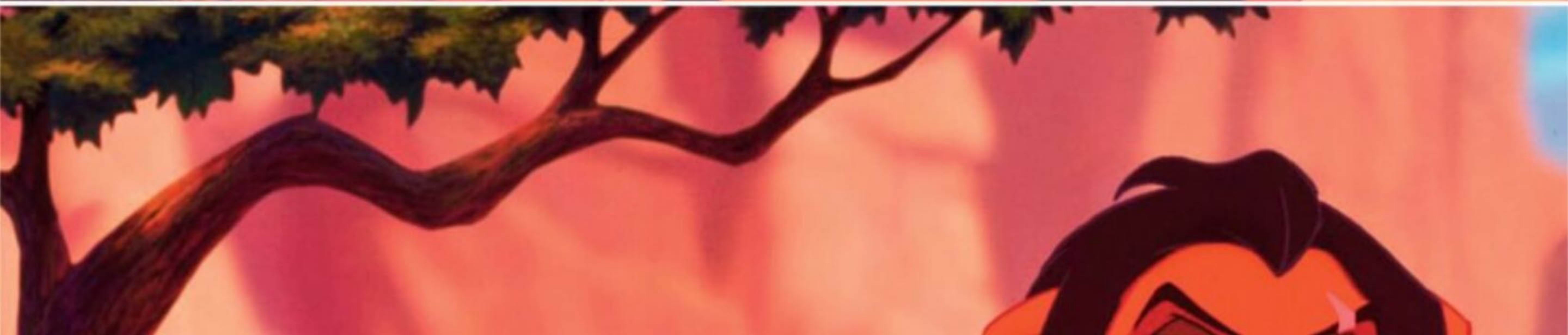
THE BACKSTORY: In the late 1980s, Alan Menken had pitched and worked on a version of *Aladdin* that had gotten shelved before interest from directors Ron Clements and John Musker (*The Little Mermaid*) restarted the development process. But Howard Ashman, Menken’s frequent collaborator, had died by the time the movie was finally coming together. Menken wrote new songs with lyricist Tim Rice. (Three of Menken and Ashman’s songs were included in the movie.)

THE SIGNIFICANCE: Musker and Clements wanted Williams to play the genie, even as Disney exec Jeffrey Katzenberg was floating other options, including Eddie Murphy. Today it’s hard to think of anybody else in the role—it was such a vibrant performance that many thought Williams might be the first voice actor to be nominated for an Academy Award. He didn’t get the nod, but his performance was a watershed moment, making voice work cool for actors on Hollywood’s A-list.

Robin Williams’ performance as the genie was so good that A-listers suddenly became cool with voice work.







THE LION KING

(1994)

THE STORY: Instead of a classic fairy tale or literary property, Disney cooked up an original tale that borrowed liberally from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. On the vast African plains, Mufasa the lion lords over the great "Circle of Life." But his scheming brother, Scar, wants the throne and plots his murder—framing Mufasa's son, Simba, for the king's death. After spending his youth in exile with a gassy warthog and a loudmouth meerkat, Simba returns to reclaim his throne and face the trauma of his past.

THE BACKSTORY: At the time the movie was being developed, Disney Animation Studios was ramping up its production pipeline. The film was made at the same time as *Pocahontas*, but was seen as the lesser project. Most top-tier Disney animators chose to work on the former

film, which left younger artists on *The Lion King*, with an assist from Disney's satellite studio, then known as Disney-MGM Studios.

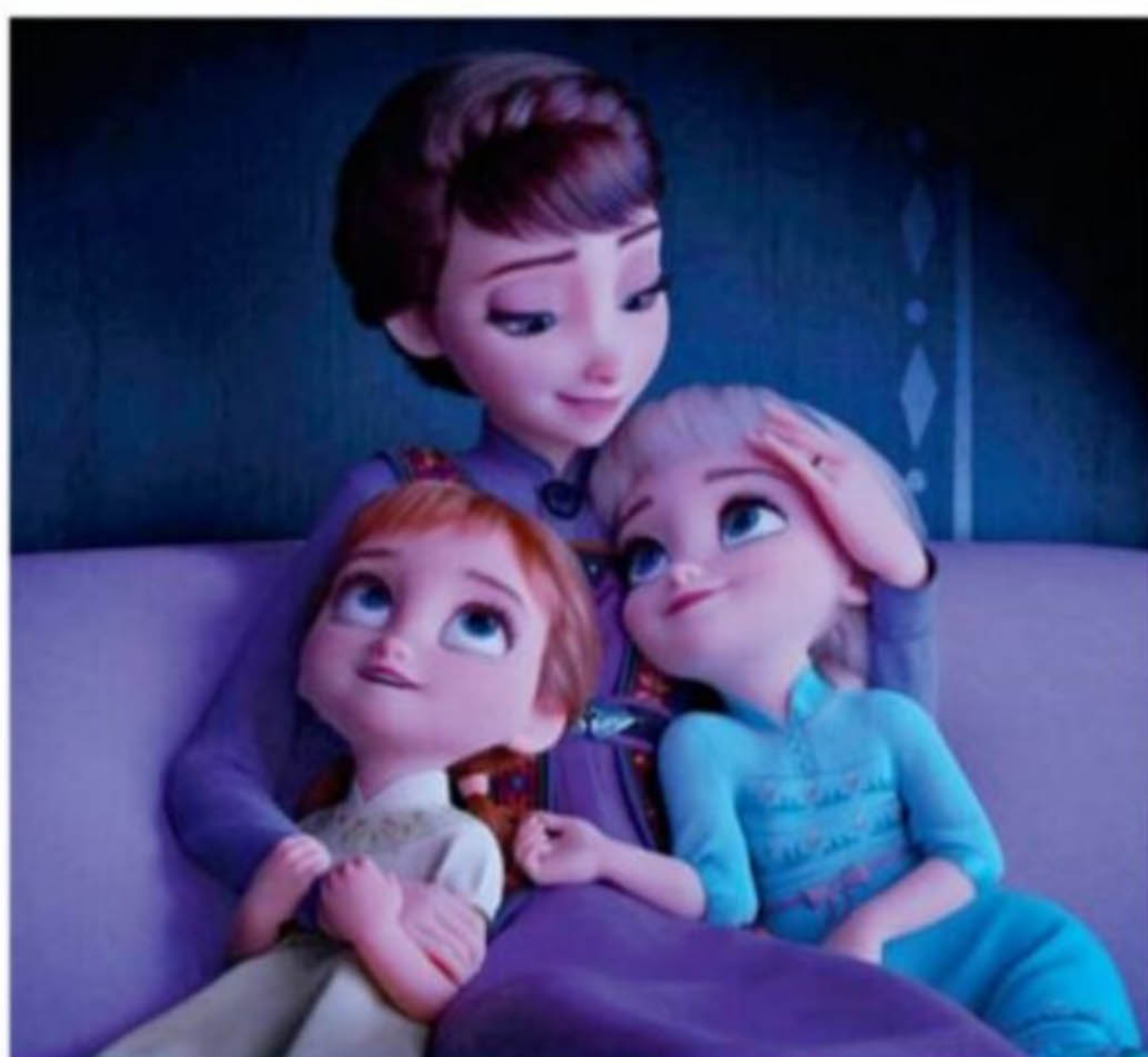
THE SIGNIFICANCE: *The Lion King* was a smash, quickly becoming the highest grossing animated movie of all time. The soundtrack, with songs by Elton John and Tim Rice, was a phenomenon. Emotionally, Disney needed the lift. Weeks before *The Lion King's* release, company president Frank Wells had been killed in a helicopter accident. This created an imbalance of power—Jeffrey Katzenberg became dissatisfied, as did CEO Michael Eisner. By October 1994 (about four months after the movie came out) Katzenberg had been ousted, ending his tenure as one of the executives most responsible for turning Disney Animation Studios back around.



Lightly regarded within the halls of Disney headquarters, *The Lion King* exceeded all expectations, becoming the highest grossing animated feature of all time.

FROZEN

(2013)



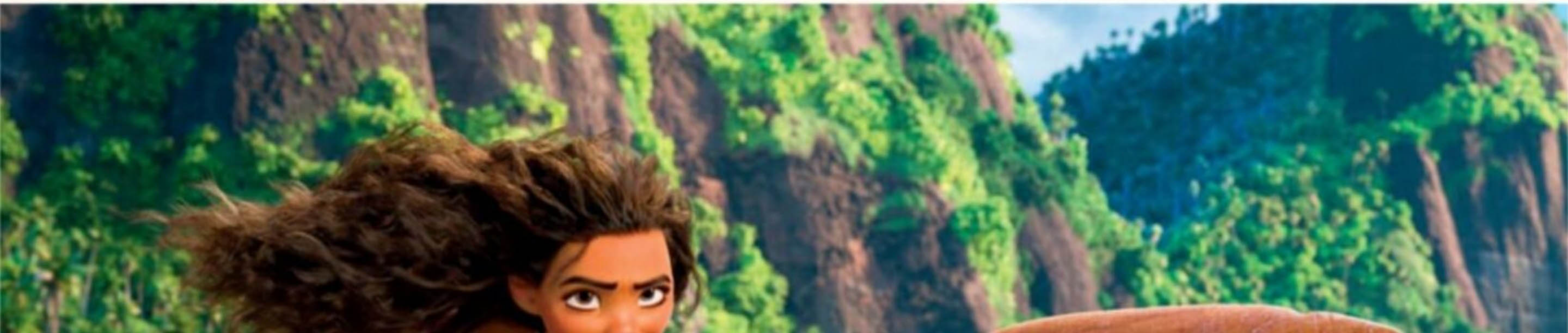
THE STORY: Loosely based on *The Snow Queen* by Hans Christian Andersen, *Frozen* tells the tale of two orphan girls: Princess Anna, a klutzy young woman, and Queen Elsa, her aloof older sister, who'd been born with the power to control ice and snow, a condition she tries to hide. After spending years alone inside her castle, Elsa flees the kingdom and creates an icy domain of her own—unwittingly leaving her homeland in a permanent winter. To save the day, Anna sets out with hunky ice cutter Kristoff and an anthropomorphic snowman to find Elsa and bring her home.

THE BACKSTORY: Walt Disney had been interested in making a film out of *The Snow Queen*, and there were several attempts in the 1990s and early 2000s to come up with an adaptation. But it wasn't until John Lasseter took over Disney Animation in 2006 that things started to click.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: If Disney had made *Frozen* when Walt was alive, it likely would have been a hit—possibly a classic. But coming out when it did, the film became something more, unlocking a phenomenon that reflected the times: a moment when people everywhere were embracing the freedom and power in the words *let it go*. Theories abound on the movie's cultural impact, particularly on those who'd been marginalized in ways big or small. Whatever the reasons for the film's success, it's clear that *Frozen* has influenced everything Disney has done ever since.

The idea of making a movie out of *The Snow Queen*, a fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, had been kicking around Disney for decades before the studio finally figured out a way to make it work.





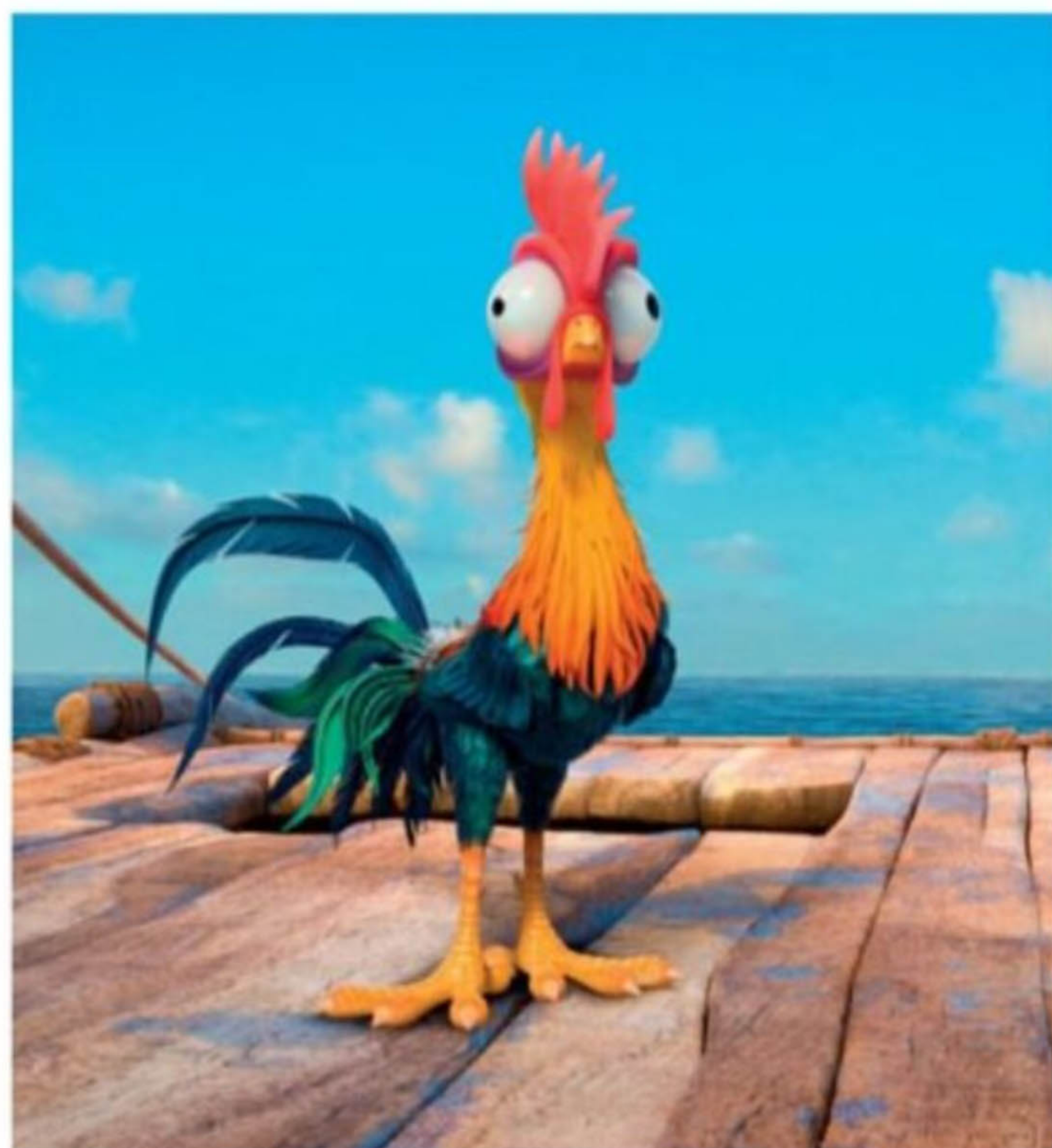
MOANA

(2016)

THE STORY: Moana is a young princess living on Motunui, a lush and verdant Polynesian island ruled by her father. When a creeping darkness threatens her home, Moana must restore a mystical artifact to its rightful place. First, she has to free a demigod named Maui (voiced by Dwayne Johnson) and go on an epic quest. It is the classic hero's journey, by way of Polynesian tradition and folklore.

THE BACKSTORY: Directors Ron Clements and John Musker (*The Little Mermaid* and *Aladdin*) were intrigued by a story centered on a trickster demigod. They later embraced a more culturally realistic tale—but it took a while. The result was a production so drawn out that one of the movie's songwriters—Lin-Manuel Miranda—completed the bulk of the work on his Broadway smash *Hamilton* before *Moana* hit theaters.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: *Moana* was the first film by Clements and Musker that was created using computer animation. While the movie wasn't a smash out of the gate (it lost the best animated feature Oscar to Disney's own *Zootopia*), it's become a favorite since, spawning upcoming theme park attractions, a series on Disney+ and a live-action adaptation.



Directors Ron Clements and John Musker were Disney veterans (*The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*), but *Moana* was their first time using a computer to do the animation.

ENCANTO

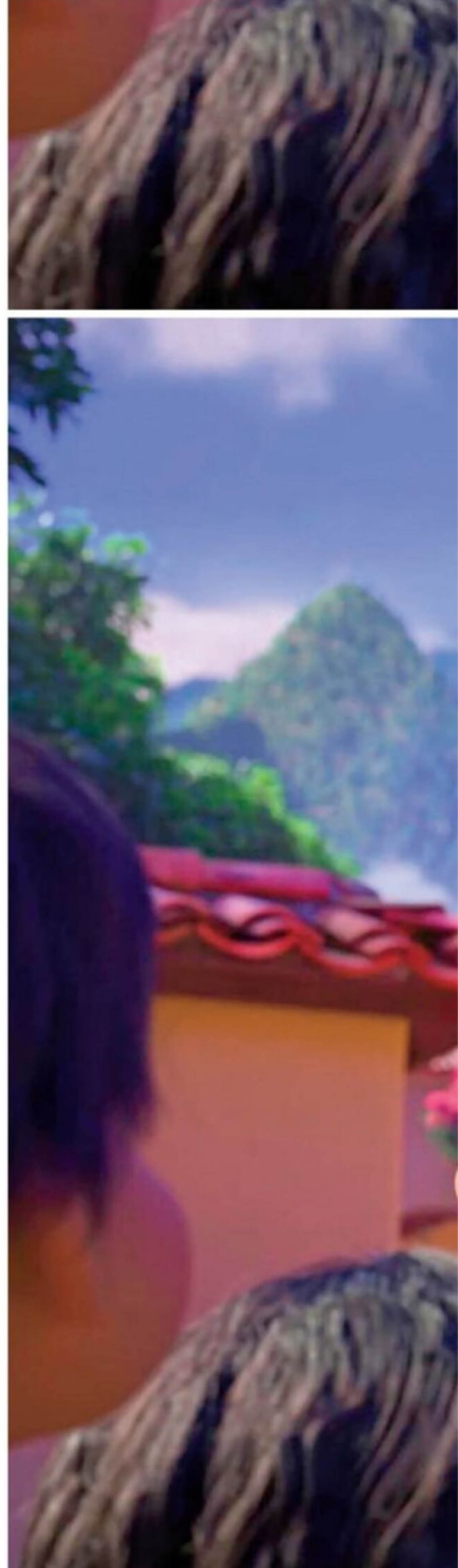
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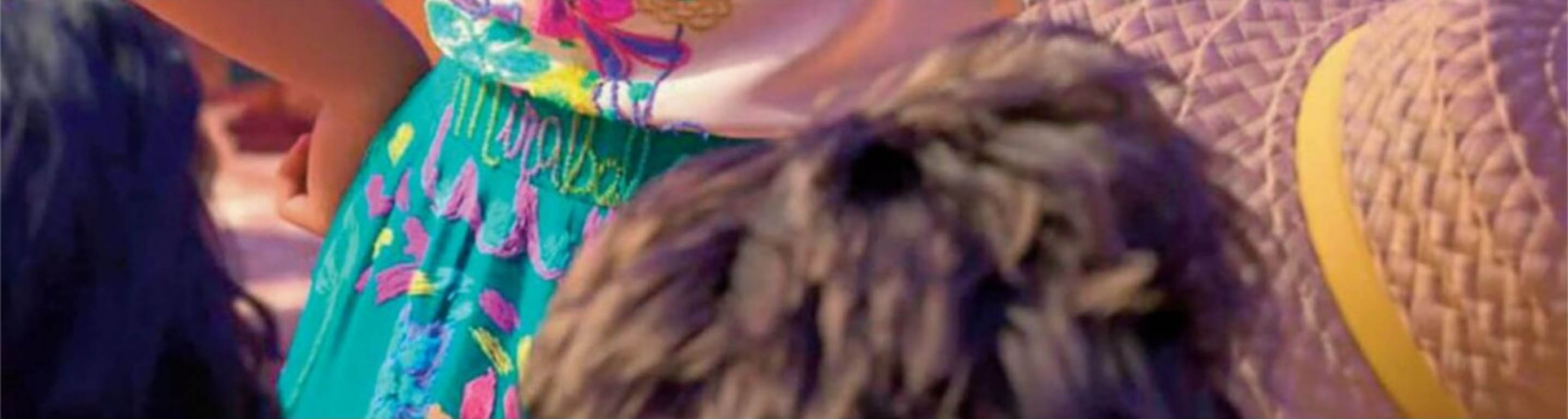
THE STORY: In a Colombian village where every member of the Madrigal family has magical abilities, one mysteriously has none—the awkward and empathetic teen Mirabel. One day, Mirabel has a vision of the village’s magical candle being extinguished. This leads her on a quest to learn the truth about those closest to her, including what happened to her uncle Bruno, who’d disappeared years earlier under strange circumstances.

THE BACKSTORY: Rich Moore and Byron Howard, the directors of *Zootopia*, wanted their follow-up film for Disney to be a musical inspired by their extended families. When Lin-Manuel Miranda came on to write songs for the film, it became about a Latin American family. The story went through many iterations, including one with Mirabel’s quinceañera and another covering more than 100 years. Eventually everything was whittled away to the core story, which focuses on the special spark inside everyone.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: Disney released *Raya and the Last Dragon* concurrently in theaters and on Disney+ in March 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Encanto*, which came out eight months later, was meant to be the studio’s big return to theaters. After a solid box-office run, the movie really took off around Christmas, when it appeared on Disney+. It helped that “We Don’t Talk About Bruno” became the most streamed song in the country. A few months later, *Encanto* won the Oscar for best animated feature.

A movie about the special spark inside us all, *Encanto* won the Oscar for best animated feature.





100 YEARS OF ANIMATED DISNEY CLASSICS

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